1918 Influenza Readings

6/1/2020

The readings this week present two views of the onset of pandemic influenza in 1918: one, a fictional sketch (drawn from life); the other a medical text.

As you read, consider the following questions:

> What ways of thinking about disease seem common to both texts? Where do they diverge?
>
> What details are important to each writer, and why? How do these details shape a picture of the disease?

Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (chapters 5 and 6), 1923

> *In this excerpt from Willa Cather's* One of Ours, *influenza breaks out on board an American troop ship* en route *to Europe during World War I. Pay attention to the lines of authority and understanding shape her characters' experiences with the disease.*

William Collier, "A New Type of Influenza," *The Lancet* 192: 4965 (26 October 1918) 567

> *By the fall of 1918, many doctors were beginning to sense that the cases of pneumonia and influenza that they were seeing with increasing frequency on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean were not simply run of the mill influenza. But how should medicine put a precise point on that sense? This short letter to* The Lancet, *a British medical journal, documents a few ways of approaching the problem.*

THE BELGIAN DOCTORS' AND PHARMACISTS' RELIEF FUND.

A MEETING of the Executive Committee of this Fund was held at the offices of THE LANCET on Monday, Oct. 21st, Sir RICKMAN GODLEE being in the chair.

The HON. SECRETARY reported that the 12 City Livery Companies had been approached with a request for financial help. No answers had been received from four of the Companies, and in the case of the remainder the reply amounted to a qualified refusal in all except one.

The munificent gift of £200 monthly from the American Red Cross was gratefully acknowledged by the Committee. Mr. Ernest P. Bicknell, Commissioner for Belgium of the American Red Cross, wrote to the chairman in August last announcing this intention, and asking to be kept informed of the progress of the Fund. A statement of the activities of the Fund and its existing position having been sent to him by the Hon. Secretary, a letter was received from the American Red Cross confirming the subsidy of £200 per month to the Fund until the end of the year, and alluding to a possibility of its continuance for a longer period. The Committee, while acknowledging with gratitude this magnificent gift, felt certain that the British medical and pharmaceutical professions would continue to contribute their share to the Fund.

In regard to the new situation created by the Allied advance, Sir RICKMAN GODLEE understood that local Belgian Committees would continue to act in the regained territory, although doubtless the need would not be so urgent as in the parts of Belgium still occupied.

The HON. TREASURER presented an audited cash statement from Dec. 1st, 1917, to August 31st, 1918, showing that £3924 0*s.* 3*d.* had been expended in relief and £161 0*s.* 7*d.* in administration, including the cost of the recent Special Appeal, leaving a balance in hand of £1289 17*s.* 1*d.* He added that the first part of the Second Appeal in the New Year had brought in about £963; the circular letter to the medical profession then produced a further £1715; and a special article in the medical press £1455; a total of about £4134—a sum exceeding the auditors' statement, inasmuch as £286 had been subscribed since Sept. 1st. The monthly payments, which began in May, were bringing in £16 3*s.* 6*d.* per month.

It was decided to continue to send to Belgium a mensuality of £400 a month until the end of the year.

URBAN VITAL STATISTICS.

(Week ended Oct. 19th, 1918.)

English and Welsh Towns.—In the 96 English and Welsh towns, with an aggregate civil population estimated at 16,500,000 persons, the annual rate of mortality was 20·7, against 12·6 and 15·1 per 1000 in the two preceding weeks. In London, with a population slightly exceeding 4,000,000 persons, the death-rate was 20·1, or 6·2 per 1000 above that recorded in the previous week; among the remaining towns the rates ranged from 5·4 in West Bromwich, 6·0 in Smethwick, and 6·4 in Rotherham, to 46·0 in Birkenhead, 46·2 in Liverpool, 48·3 in Gloucester, 58·3 in Southampton, and 68·6 in Portsmouth. The principal epidemic diseases caused 212 deaths, which corresponded to an annual rate of 0·7 per 1000, and included 89 from infantile diarrhœa, 61 from diphtheria, 20 from whooping-cough, 16 from measles, 15 from scarlet fever, and 11 from enteric fever. The deaths from influenza numbered 1895, and included 371 in London, 215 in Liverpool, 178 in Portsmouth, 81 in Southampton, 71 in Hull, 69 in Sheffield, and 62 in Cardiff. The 1241 cases of scarlet fever and 1205 of diphtheria under treatment in the Metropolitan Asylums Hospitals and the London Fever Hospital were 93 and 23 above the respective numbers remaining at the end of the previous week. The causes of 55 deaths in the 96 towns were uncertified, and included 21 in Liverpool, 5 in Birmingham, and 3 each in Portsmouth, Hull, and South Shields.

Scotch Towns.—In the 16 largest Scotch towns, with an aggregate population estimated at nearly 2,500,000 persons, the annual rate of mortality was 28·3, against rates steadily increasing from 10·6 to 24·7 per 1000 in the five preceding weeks. Of the 1303 deaths from all causes, 63 were classified to influenza, which was also stated as a contributory cause in 426 deaths classified to other diseases; in the previous week these numbers were 45 and 339 respectively. The 820 deaths in Glasgow corresponded to an annual rate of 38·4 per 1000, and included 10 from whooping-cough, 5 each from diphtheria and infantile diarrhœa, and 1 from measles. The 83 deaths in Edinburgh were equal to a rate of 13·0 per 1000, and included 2 from whooping-cough and 1 each from scarlet fever and diphtheria.

Irish Towns.—The 295 deaths in Dublin corresponded to an annual rate of 38·6, or 14·0 per 1000 above the rate recorded in the previous week, and included 8 from infantile diarrhœa, 4 from whooping-cough, and 1 from diphtheria. The 83 deaths in Belfast were equal to a rate of 11·0 per 1000, and included 5 from infantile diarrhœa and 2 each from scarlet fever and diphtheria.

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

A NEW TYPE OF INFLUENZA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Surely we are seeing a type of influenza quite different from anything we have seen before. Side by side with influenza of the ordinary type we are meeting with cases which exhibit the following symptoms and physical signs. Within a few hours of seizure the patient's temperature runs up to 105° or over, while the pulse ranges round 90; a high temperature with a slow pulse; the lips and face exhibit marked cyanosis, and epistaxis frequently occurs. In the course of a day or two the patient begins to spit up a quantity of frothy sputum tinged with bright blood. In spite of the fever the pulse is regular, of good volume, and fairly strong, and the rate is generally below 100, at times below 90. On examination the area of cardiac dullness is not increased, and there is no evidence of distension of the right side of the heart. For the first day or two the physical signs in the lungs are very indefinite and point to capillary bronchitis rather than to a bronchopneumonia; later on there may develop signs of patches of consolidation. During the past six days among a large number of patients I have seen about a dozen cases such as I have described. In two instances I have seen the changes exhibited on the post-mortem table. In both cases the lungs were emphysematous and showed signs of recent pleurisy. Scattered patches of purpura were present. On section patches of capillary bronchitis appeared to surround small patches of consolidated lung, which sank in water; distinct areas of hæmorrhage into the lung tissue were present. I well remember the severe epidemic in 1889–90, and attended a large number of cases, but the signs and symptoms to which I refer, and which have been exhibited by patients I have attended during the past few days, are quite new to me.

Are we dealing with a new organism or with the recognised organisms of influenza which have for some reason attained greater virulence?—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Oxford, Oct. 23rd, 1918. WM. COLLIER.

NASO-PHARYNGEAL INFECTION AT THE ONSET OF CEREBRO-SPINAL FEVER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I do not intend to be drawn into a long correspondence upon side issues. If, however, you think that the scientific basis of the discussion has any general interest I will re-state my case shortly and, I hope, clearly as follows:—

Origin of discussion.—Statement made by Lieutenant-Colonel M. H. Gordon: "Every case of cerebro-spinal fever is ..... an instance of a carrier developing the disease." This was a statement of epidemiological importance. Exactly similar views were also held by two authorities quoted by Surgeon S. L. Baker and myself in No. 17 of the Special Report Series of the Medical Research Committee.

Cause of the discussion.—Observations made by Temporary Surgeon Baker and myself published in THE LANCET of Oct. 20th, 1917. These had the effect of disputing the scientific accuracy of the above statement of Colonel Gordon.

1. Twenty-six cases of cerebro-spinal fever were swabbed before the onset of the disease. All were negative. The number has since mounted to 43.

2. Four hundred and eighty-five proved carriers failed to develop cerebro-spinal fever. The number has since mounted to about 700. These carriers were both chronic and transient.

Beginning of the discussion.—Statement in a letter to THE LANCET by Colonel Gordon that we had misunderstood him. We thought we had not, and therefore did not reply, to avoid a polemic.

Outbreak of polemic.—Letter by Major J. Dorgan to THE LANCET nearly a year later, also disputing Colonel Gordon's statement. In the course of his argument he made, independently, exactly the same points as we did and another point relating to the presence of meningococci in the throat *after* the onset of the disease. On this matter we agree with Colonel Gordon rather than with Major Dorgan, but not for the reasons Colonel Gordon advanced and against which I protested in THE LANCET of Sept. 14th.

BY

WILLA CATHER

One of Ours

"Bidding the eagles of the West fly on . . ."

VACHEL LINDSAY

ALFRED A. KNOPF *New York* · 1960

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THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK,
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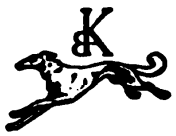

Manufactured in the United States of America

V

THAT night the Virginian, who berthed under Victor Morse, had an alarming attack of nose-bleed, and by morning he was so weak that he had to be carried to the hospital. The Doctor said they might as well face the facts; a scourge of influenza had broken out on board, of a peculiarly bloody and malignant type.* Everybody was a little frightened. Some of the officers shut themselves up in the smoking-room, and drank whiskey and soda and played poker all day, as if they could keep contagion out.

Lieutenant Bird died late in the afternoon and was buried at sunrise the next day, sewed up in a tarpaulin, with an eighteen pound shell at his feet. The morning broke brilliantly clear and bitter cold. The sea was rolling blue walls of water, and the boat was raked by a wind as sharp as ice. Excepting those who were sick, the boys turned out to a man. It was the first burial at sea they had ever witnessed, and they couldn't help finding it interesting. The Chaplain read the burial service while they stood with uncovered heads. The Kansas band played a solemn march, the Swedish quartette sang a hymn. Many a man turned his face away when that brown sack was lowered into the cold, leaping indigo ridges that seemed so destitute of anything friendly to human kind. In a moment it was done, and they steamed on without him.

The glittering walls of water kept rolling in, indigo, purple,

*The actual outbreak of influenza on transports carrying United States troops is here anticipated by several months.

more brilliant than on the days of mild weather. The blinding sunlight did not temper the cold, which cut the face and made the lungs ache. Landsmen began to have that miserable sense of being where they were never meant to be. The boys lay in heaps on the deck, trying to keep warm by hugging each other close. Everybody was seasick. Fanning went to bed with his clothes on, so sick he couldn't take off his boots. Claude lay in the crowded stern, too cold, too faint to move. The sun poured over them like flame, without any comfort in it. The strong, curling, foam-crested waves threw off the light like millions of mirrors, and their colour was almost more than the eye could bear. The water seemed denser than before, heavy like melted glass, and the foam on the edges of each blue ridge looked sharp as crystals. If a man should fall into them, he would be cut to pieces.

The whole ocean seemed suddenly to have come to life, the waves had a malignant, graceful, muscular energy, were animated by a kind of mocking cruelty. Only a few hours ago a gentle boy had been thrown into that freezing water and forgotten. Yes, already forgotten; every one had his own miseries to think about.

Late in the afternoon the wind fell, and there was a sinister sunset. Across the red west a small, ragged black cloud hurried,— then another, and another. They came up out of the sea,— wild, witchlike shapes that travelled fast and met in the west as if summoned for an evil conclave. They hung there against the afterglow, distinct black shapes, drawing together, devising something. The few men who were left on deck felt that no good could come out of a sky like that. They wished they were at home, in France, anywhere but here.

VI

THE next morning Doctor Trueman asked Claude to help him at sick call. "I've got a bunch of sergeants taking temperatures, but it's too much for one man to oversee. I don't want to ask anything of those dude officers who sit in there playing poker all the time. Either they've got no conscience, or they're not awake to the gravity of the situation."

The Doctor stood on deck in his raincoat, his foot on the rail to keep his equilibrium, writing on his knee as the long string of men came up to him. There were more than seventy in the line that morning, and some of them looked as if they ought to be in a drier place. Rain beat down on the sea like lead bullets. The old *Anchises* floundered from one grey ridge to another, quite alone. Fog cut off the cheering sight of the sister ships. The doctor had to leave his post from time to time, when seasickness got the better of his will. Claude, at his elbow, was noting down names and temperatures. In the middle of his work he told the sergeants to manage without him for a few minutes. Down near the end of the line he had seen one of his own men misconducting himself, snivelling and crying like a baby,— a fine husky boy of eighteen who had never given any trouble. Claude made a dash for him and clapped him on the shoulder.

"If you can't stop that, Bert Fuller, get where you won't be seen. I don't want all these English stewards standing around to watch an American soldier cry. I never heard of such a thing!"

"I can't help it, Lieutenant," the boy blubbered. "I've kept it back just as long as I can. I can't hold in any longer!"

"What's the matter with you? Come over here and sit down on this box and tell me."

Private Fuller willingly let himself be led, and dropped on the box. "I'm so sick, Lieutenant!"

"I'll see how sick you are." Claude stuck a thermometer into his mouth, and while he waited, sent the deck steward to bring a cup of tea. "Just as I thought, Fuller. You've not half a degree of fever. You're scared, and that's all. Now drink this tea. I expect you didn't eat any breakfast."

"No, sir. I can't eat the awful stuff on this boat."

"It is pretty bad. Where are you from?"

"I'm from P-P-Pleasantville, up on the P-P-Platte," the boy gulped, and his tears began to flow afresh.

"Well, now, what would they think of you, back there? I suppose they got the band out and made a fuss over you when you went away, and thought they were sending off a fine soldier. And I've always thought you'd be a first-rate soldier. I guess we'll forget about this. You feel better already, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. This tastes awful good. I've been so sick to my stomach, and last night I got pains in my chest. All my crowd is sick, and you took big Tannhauser, I mean Corporal, away to the hospital. It looks like we're all going to die out here."

"I know it's a little gloomy. But don't you shame me before these English stewards."

"I won't do it again, sir," he promised.

When the medical inspection was over, Claude took the Doctor down to see Fanning, who had been coughing and

wheezing all night and hadn't got out of his berth. The examination was short. The Doctor knew what was the matter before he put the stethoscope on him. "It's pneumonia, both lungs," he said when they came out into the corridor. "I have one case in the hospital that will die before morning."

"What can you do for him, Doctor?"

"You see how I'm fixed; close onto two hundred men sick, and one doctor. The medical supplies are wholly inadequate. There's not castor oil enough on this boat to keep the men clean inside. I'm using my own drugs, but they won't last through an epidemic like this. I can't do much for Lieutenant Fanning. You can, though, if you'll give him the time. You can take better care of him right here than he could get in the hospital. We haven't an empty bed there."

Claude found Victor Morse and told him he had better get a berth in one of the other staterooms. When Victor left with his belongings, Fanning stared after him. "Is he going?"

"Yes. It's too crowded in here, if you've got to stay in bed."

"Glad of it. His stories are too raw for me. I'm no sissy, but that fellow's a regular Don Quixote."

Claude laughed. "You mustn't talk. It makes you cough."

"Where's the Virginian?"

"Who, Bird?" Claude asked in astonishment,—Fanning had stood beside him at Bird's funeral. "Oh, he's gone, too. You sleep if you can."

After dinner Doctor Trueman came in and showed Claude how to give his patient an alcohol bath. "It's simply a question of whether you can keep up his strength. Don't try any of this greasy food they serve here. Give him a raw egg

beaten up in the juice of an orange every two hours, night and day. Waken him out of his sleep when it's time, don't miss a single two-hour period. I'll write an order to your table steward, and you can beat the eggs up here in your cabin. Now I must go to the hospital. It's wonderful what those band boys are doing there. I begin to take some pride in the place. That big German has been asking for you. He's in a very bad way."

As there were no nurses on board, the Kansas band had taken over the hospital. They had been trained for stretcher and first aid work, and when they realized what was happening on the *Anchises,* the bandmaster came to the Doctor and offered the services of his men. He chose nurses and orderlies, divided them into night and day shifts.

When Claude went to see his Corporal, big Tannhauser did not recognize him. He was quite out of his head and was conversing with his own family in the language of his early childhood. The Kansas boys had singled him out for special attention. The mere fact that he kept talking in a tongue forbidden on the surface of the seas, made him seem more friendless and alone than the others.

From the hospital Claude went down into the hold where half-a-dozen of his company were lying ill. The hold was damp and musty as an old cellar, so steeped in the smells and leakage of innumerable dirty cargoes that it could not be made or kept clean. There was almost no ventilation, and the air was fetid with sickness and sweat and vomit. Two of the band boys were working in the stench and dirt, helping the stewards. Claude stayed to lend a hand until it was time to give Fanning his nourishment. He began to see that the wrist watch, which he had hitherto despised as effeminate and had

carried in his pocket, might be a very useful article. After he had made Fanning swallow his egg, he piled all the available blankets on him and opened the port to give the cabin an airing. While the fresh wind blew in, he sat down on the edge of his berth and tried to collect his wits. What had become of those first days of golden weather, leisure and good-comradeship? The band concerts, the Lindsborg Quartette, the first excitement and novelty of being at sea: all that had gone by like a dream.

That night when the Doctor came in to see Fanning, he threw his stethoscope on the bed and said wearily, "It's a wonder that instrument doesn't take root in my ears and grow there." He sat down and sucked his thermometer for a few minutes, then held it out for inspection. Claude looked at it and told him he ought to go to bed.

"Then who's to be up and around? No bed for me, to-night. But I will have a hot bath by and by."

Claude asked why the ship's doctor didn't do anything and added that he must be as little as he looked.

"Chessup? No, he's not half bad when you get to know him. He's given me a lot of help about preparing medicines, and it's a great assistance to talk the cases over with him. He'll do anything for me except directly handle the patients. He doesn't want to exceed his authority. It seems the English marine is very particular about such things. He's a Canadian, and he graduated first in his class at Edinburgh. I gather he was frozen out in private practice. You see, his appearance is against him. It's an awful handicap to look like a kid and be as shy as he is."

The Doctor rose, shored up his shoulders and took his bag. "You're looking fine yourself, Lieutenant," he remarked.

"Parents both living? Were they quite young when you were born? Well, then their parents were, probably. I'm a crank about that. Yes, I'll get my bath pretty soon, and I will lie down for an hour or two. With those splendid band boys running the hospital, I get a little lee-way."

Claude wondered how the Doctor kept going. He knew he hadn't had more than four hours sleep out of the last forty-eight, and he was not a man of rugged constitution. His bath steward was, as he said, his comfort. Hawkins was an old fellow who had held better positions on better boats,— yes, in better times, too. He had first gone to sea as a bath steward, and now, through the fortunes of war, he had come back where he began,— not a good place for an old man. His back was bent meekly, and he shuffled along with broken arches. He looked after the comfort of all the officers, and attended the doctor like a valet; got out his clean linen, persuaded him to lie down and have a hot drink after his bath, stood on guard at his door to take messages for him in the short hours when he was resting. Hawkins had lost two sons in the war and he seemed to find a solemn consolation in being of service to soldiers. "Take it a bit easy now, sir. You'll 'ave it 'ard enough over there," he used to say to one and another.

At eleven o'clock one of the Kansas men came to tell Claude that his Corporal was going fast. Big Tannhauser's fever had left him, but so had everything else. He lay in a stupor. His congested eyeballs were rolled back in his head and only the yellowish whites were visible. His mouth was open and his tongue hung out at one side. From the end of the corridor Claude had heard the frightful sounds that came from his throat, sounds like violent vomiting, or the choking rattle of a man in strangulation,— and, indeed, he was being strangled.

One of the band boys brought Claude a camp chair, and said kindly, "He doesn't suffer. It's mechanical now. He'd go easier if he hadn't so much vitality. The Doctor says he may have a few moments of consciousness just at the last, if you want to stay."

"I'll go down and give my private patient his egg, and then I'll come back." Claude went away and returned, and sat dozing by the bed. After three o'clock the noise of struggle ceased; instantly the huge figure on the bed became again his good-natured corporal. The mouth closed, the glassy jellies were once more seeing, intelligent human eyes. The face lost its swollen, brutish look and was again the face of a friend. It was almost unbelievable that anything so far gone could come back. He looked up wistfully at his Lieutenant as if to ask him something. His eyes filled with tears, and he turned his head away a little.

"Mein' arme Mutter!" he whispered distinctly.

A few moments later he died in perfect dignity, not struggling under torture, but consciously, it seemed to Claude,— like a brave boy giving back what was not his to keep.

Claude returned to his cabin, roused Fanning once more, and then threw himself upon his tipping bunk. The boat seemed to wallow and sprawl in the waves, as he had seen animals do on the farm when they gave birth to young. How helpless the old vessel was out here in the pounding seas, and how much misery she carried! He lay looking up at the rusty water pipes and unpainted joinings. This liner was in truth the "Old Anchises"; even the carpenters who made her over for the service had not thought her worth the trouble, and had done their worst by her. The new partitions were hung to the joists by a few nails.

Big Tannhauser had been one of those who were most anxious to sail. He used to grin and say, "France is the only climate that's healthy for a man with a name like mine." He had waved his good-bye to the image in the New York harbour with the rest, believed in her like the rest. He only wanted to serve. It seemed hard.

When Tannhauser first came to camp he was confused all the time, and couldn't remember instructions. Claude had once stepped him out in front of the line and reprimanded him for not knowing his right side from his left. When he looked into the case, he found that the fellow was not eating anything, that he was ill from homesickness. He was one of those farmer boys who are afraid of town. The giant baby of a long family, he had never slept away from home a night in his life before he enlisted.

Corporal Tannhauser, along with four others, was buried at sunrise. No band this time; the chaplain was ill, so one of the young captains read the service. Claude stood by watching until the sailors shot one sack, longer by half a foot than the other four, into a lead-coloured chasm in the sea. There was not even a splash. After breakfast one of the Kansas orderlies called him into a little cabin where they had prepared the dead men for burial. The Army regulations minutely defined what was to be done with a deceased soldier's effects. His uniform, shoes, blankets, arms, personal baggage, were all disposed of according to instructions. But in each case there was a residue; the dead man's toothbrushes, his razors, and the photographs he carried upon his person. There they were in five pathetic little heaps; what should be done with them?

Claude took up the photographs that had belonged to his

corporal; one was a fat, foolish-looking girl in a white dress that was too tight for her, and a floppy hat, a little flag pinned on her plump bosom. The other was an old woman, seated, her hands crossed in her lap. Her thin hair was drawn back tight from a hard, angular face — unmistakably an Old-World face — and her eyes squinted at the camera. She looked honest and stubborn and unconvinced, he thought, as if she did not in the least understand.

"I'll take these," he said. "And the others — just pitch them over, don't you think?"

VII

B COMPANY'S first officer, Captain Maxey, was so sea-sick throughout the voyage that he was of no help to his men in the epidemic. It must have been a frightful blow to his pride, for nobody was ever more anxious to do an officer's whole duty.

Claude had known Harris Maxey slightly in Lincoln; had met him at the Erlichs' and afterward kept up a campus acquaintance with him. He hadn't liked Maxey then, and he didn't like him now, but he thought him a good officer. Maxey's family were poor folk from Mississippi, who had settled in Nemaha county, and he was very ambitious, not only to get on in the world, but, as he said, to "be somebody." His life at the University was a feverish pursuit of social advantages and useful acquaintances. His feeling for the "right people" amounted to veneration. After his graduation, Maxey served on the Mexican Border. He was a tireless drill master, and threw himself into his duties with all the energy of which his frail physique was capable. He was slight and fair-skinned; a rigid jaw threw his lower teeth out beyond the upper ones and made his face look stiff. His whole manner, tense and nervous, was the expression of a passionate desire to excel.

Claude seemed to himself to be leading a double life these days. When he was working over Fanning, or was down in the hold helping to take care of the sick soldiers, he had no time to think,— did mechanically the next thing that came to hand. But when he had an hour to himself on deck, the tingling

sense of ever-widening freedom flashed up in him again. The weather was a continual adventure; he had never known any like it before. The fog, and rain, the grey sky and the lonely grey stretches of the ocean were like something he had imagined long ago — memories of old sea stories read in childhood, perhaps — and they kindled a warm spot in his heart. Here on the *Anchises* he seemed to begin where childhood had left off. The ugly hiatus between had closed up. Years of his life were blotted out in the fog. This fog which had been at first depressing had become a shelter; a tent moving through space, hiding one from all that had been before, giving one a chance to correct one's ideas about life and to plan the future. The past was physically shut off; that was his illusion. He had already travelled a great many more miles than were told off by the ship's log. When Bandmaster Fred Max asked him to play chess, he had to stop a moment and think why it was that game had such disagreeable associations for him. Enid's pale, deceptive face seldom rose before him unless some such accident brought it up. If he happened to come upon a group of boys talking about their sweethearts and war-brides, he listened a moment and then moved away with the happy feeling that he was the least married man on the boat.

There was plenty of deck room, now that so many men were ill either from sea-sickness or the epidemic, and sometimes he and Albert Usher had the stormy side of the boat almost to themselves. The Marine was the best sort of companion for these gloomy days; steady, quiet, self-reliant. And he, too, was always looking forward. As for Victor Morse, Claude was growing positively fond of him. Victor had tea in a special corner of the officers' smoking-room every

afternoon—he would have perished without it—and the steward always produced some special garnishes of toast and jam or sweet biscuit for him. Claude usually managed to join him at that hour.

On the day of Tannhauser's funeral he went into the smoking-room at four. Victor beckoned the steward and told him to bring a couple of hot whiskeys with the tea. "You're very wet, you know, Wheeler, and you really should. There," he said as he put down his glass, "don't you feel better with a drink?"

"Very much. I think I'll have another. It's agreeable to be warm inside."

"Two more, steward, and bring me some fresh lemon." The occupants of the room were either reading or talking in low tones. One of the Swedish boys was playing softly on the old piano. Victor began to pour the tea. He had a neat way of doing it, and today he was especially solicitous. "This Scotch mist gets into one's bones, doesn't it? I thought you were looking rather seedy when I passed you on deck."

"I was up with Tannhauser last night. Didn't get more than an hour's sleep," Claude murmured, yawning.

"Yes, I heard you lost your big corporal. I'm sorry. I've had bad news, too. It's out now that we're to make a French port. That dashes all my plans. However, *c'est la guerre!*" He pushed back his cup with a shrug. "Take a turn outside?"

Claude had often wondered why Victor liked him, since he was so little Victor's kind. "If it isn't a secret," he said, "I'd like to know how you ever got into the British army, anyway."

As they walked up and down in the rain, Victor told his

story briefly. When he had finished High School, he had gone into his father's bank at Crystal Lake as bookkeeper. After banking hours he skated, played tennis, or worked in the strawberry-bed, according to the season. He bought two pairs of white pants every summer and ordered his shirts from Chicago and thought he was a swell, he said. He got himself engaged to the preacher's daughter. Two years ago, the summer he was twenty, his father wanted him to see Niagara Falls; so he wrote a modest check, warned his son against saloons — Victor had never been inside one — against expensive hotels and women who came up to ask the time without an introduction, and sent him off, telling him it wasn't necessary to fee porters or waiters. At Niagara Falls, Victor fell in with some young Canadian officers who opened his eyes to a great many things. He went over to Toronto with them. Enlistment was going strong, and he saw an avenue of escape from the bank and the strawberry-bed. The air force seemed the most brilliant and attractive branch of the service. They accepted him, and here he was.

"You'll never go home again," Claude said with conviction. "I don't see you settling down in any little Iowa town."

"In the air service," said Victor carelessly, "we don't concern ourselves about the future. It's not worth while." He took out a dull gold cigarette case which Claude had noticed before.

"Let me see that a minute, will you? I've often admired it. A present from somebody you like, isn't it?"

A twitch of feeling, something quite genuine, passed over the air-man's boyish face, and his rather small red mouth compressed sharply. "Yes, a woman I want you to meet. Here," twitching his chin over his high collar, "I'll write

Maisie's address on my card: 'Introducing Lieutenant Wheeler, A. E. F.' That's all you'll need. If you should get to London before I do, don't hesitate. Call on her at once. Present this card, and she'll receive you."

Claude thanked him and put the card in his pocketbook, while Victor lit a cigarette. "I haven't forgotten that you're dining with us at the Savoy, if we happen in London together. If I'm there, you can always find me. Her address is mine. It will really be a great thing for you to meet a woman like Maisie. She'll be nice to you, because you're my friend." He went on to say that she had done everything in the world for him; had left her husband and given up her friends on his account. She now had a studio flat in Chelsea, where she simply waited his coming and dreaded his going. It was an awful life for her. She entertained other officers, of course, old acquaintances; but it was all camouflage. He was the man.

Victor went so far as to produce her picture, and Claude gazed without knowing what to say at a large moon-shaped face with heavy-lidded, weary eyes,—the neck clasped by a pearl collar, the shoulders bare to the matronly swell of the bosom. There was not a line or wrinkle in that smooth expanse of flesh, but from the heavy mouth and chin, from the very shape of the face, it was easy to see that she was quite old enough to be Victor's mother. Across the photograph was written in a large splashy hand, *À mon aigle!* Had Victor been delicate enough to leave him in any doubt, Claude would have preferred to believe that his relations with this lady were wholly of a filial nature.

"Women like her simply don't exist in your part of the world," the aviator murmured, as he snapped the photograph

case. "She's a linguist and musician and all that. With her. every-day living is a fine art. Life, as she says, is what one makes it. In itself, it's nothing. Where you came from it's nothing — a sleeping sickness."

Claude laughed. "I don't know that I agree with you, but I like to hear you talk."

"Well; in that part of France that's all shot to pieces, you'll find more life going on in the cellars than in your home town, wherever that is. I'd rather be a stevedore in the London docks than a banker-king in one of your prairie States. In London, if you're lucky enough to have a shilling, you can get something for it."

"Yes, things are pretty tame at home," the other admitted.

"Tame? My God, it's death in life! What's left of men if you take all the fire out of them? They're afraid of everything. I know them; Sunday-school sneaks, prowling around those little towns after dark!" Victor abruptly dismissed the subject. "By the way, you're pals with the doctor, aren't you? I'm needing some medicine that is somewhere in my lost trunk. Would you mind asking him if he can put up this prescription? I don't want to go to him myself. All these medicos blab, and he might report me. I've been lucky dodging medical inspections. You see, I don't want to get held up anywhere. Tell him it's not for you, of course."

When Claude presented the piece of blue paper to Doctor Trueman, he smiled contemptuously. "I see; this has been filled by a London chemist. No, we have nothing of this sort." He handed it back. "Those things are only palliatives. If your friend wants that, he needs treatment,— and he knows where he can get it."

Claude returned the slip of paper to Victor as they left the

dining-room after supper, telling him he hadn't been able to get any.

"Sorry," said Victor, flushing haughtily. "Thank you so much!"

VIII

TOD FANNING held out better than many of the stronger men; his vitality surprised the doctor. The death list was steadily growing; and the worst of it was that patients died who were not very sick. Vigorous, clean-blooded young fellows of nineteen and twenty turned over and died because they had lost their courage, because other people were dying,— because death was in the air. The corridors of the vessel had the smell of death about them. Doctor Trueman said it was always so in an epidemic; patients died who, had they been isolated cases, would have recovered.

"Do you know, Wheeler," the doctor remarked one day when they came up from the hospital together to get a breath of air, "I sometimes wonder whether all these inoculations they've been having, against typhoid and smallpox and what-not, haven't lowered their vitality. I'll go off my head if I keep losing men! What would you give to be out of it all, and safe back on the farm?" Hearing no reply, he turned his head, peered over his raincoat collar, and saw a startled, resisting look in the young man's blue eyes, followed by a quick flush.

"You don't want to be back on the farm, do you! Not a little bit! Well, well; that's what it is to be young!" He shook his head with a smile which might have been commiseration, might have been envy, and went back to his duties.

Claude stayed where he was, drawing the wet grey air into his lungs and feeling vexed and reprimanded. It was quite

true, he realized; the doctor had caught him. He was enjoying himself all the while and didn't want to be safe anywhere. He was sorry about Tannhauser and the others, but he was not sorry for himself. The discomforts and misfortunes of this voyage had not spoiled it for him. He grumbled, of course, because others did. But life had never seemed so tempting as it did here and now. He could come up from heavy work in the hospital, or from poor Fanning and his everlasting eggs, and forget all that in ten minutes. Something inside him, as elastic as the grey ridges over which they were tipping, kept bounding up and saying: "I am all here. I've left everything behind me. I am going over."

Only on that one day, the cold day of the Virginian's funeral, when he was seasick, had he been really miserable. He must be heartless, certainly, not to be overwhelmed by the sufferings of his own men, his own friends — but he wasn't. He had them on his mind and did all he could for them, but it seemed to him just now that he took a sort of satisfaction in that, too, and was somewhat vain of his usefulness to Doctor Trueman. A nice attitude! He awoke every morning with that sense of freedom and going forward, as if the world were growing bigger each day and he were growing with it. Other fellows were sick and dying, and that was terrible,— but he and the boat went on, and always on.

Something was released that had been struggling for a long while, he told himself. He had been due in France since the first battle of the Marne; he had followed false leads and lost precious time and seen misery enough, but he was on the right road at last, and nothing could stop him. If he hadn't been so green, so bashful, so afraid of showing what he felt, and so stupid at finding his way about, he would have enlisted in Can-

ada, like Victor, or run away to France and joined the Foreign Legion. All that seemed perfectly possible now. Why hadn't he?

Well, that was not "the Wheelers' way." The Wheelers were terribly afraid of poking themselves in where they weren't wanted, of pushing their way into a crowd where they didn't belong. And they were even more afraid of doing anything that might look affected or "romantic." They couldn't let themselves adopt a conspicuous, much less a picturesque course of action, unless it was all in the day's work. Well, History had condescended to such as he; this whole brilliant adventure had become the day's work. He had got into it after all, along with Victor and the Marine and other fellows who had more imagination and self-confidence in the first place. Three years ago he used to sit moping by the windmill because he didn't see how a Nebraska farmer boy had any "call," or, indeed, any way, to throw himself into the struggle in France. He used enviously to read about Alan Seeger and those fortunate American boys who had a right to fight for a civilization they knew.

But the miracle had happened; a miracle so wide in its amplitude that the Wheelers,— all the Wheelers and the rough-necks and the low-brows were caught up in it. Yes, it was the rough-necks' own miracle, all this; it was their golden chance. He was in on it, and nothing could hinder or discourage him unless he were put over the side himself — which was only a way of joking, for that was a possibility he never seriously considered. The feeling of purpose, of fateful purpose, was strong in his breast.

IX

"LOOK at this, Doctor!" Claude caught Dr. Trueman on his way from breakfast and handed him a written notice, signed D. T. Micks, Chief Steward. It stated that no more eggs or oranges could be furnished to patients, as the supply was exhausted.

The doctor squinted at the paper. "I'm afraid that's your patient's death warrant. You'll never be able to keep him going on anything else. Why don't you go and talk it over with Chessup? He's a resourceful fellow. I'll join you there in a few minutes."

Claude had often been to Dr. Chessup's cabin since the epidemic broke out,— rather liked to wait there when he went for medicines or advice. It was a comfortable, personal sort of place with cheerful chintz hangings. The walls were lined with books, held in place by sliding wooden slats, padlocked at the ends. There were a great many scientific works in German and English; the rest were French novels in paper covers. This morning he found Chessup weighing out white powders at his desk. In the rack over his bunk was the book with which he had read himself to sleep last night; the title, "Un Crime d'Amour," lettered in black on yellow, caught Claude's eye. The doctor put on his coat and pointed his visitor to the jointed chair in which patients were sometimes examined. Claude explained his predicament.

The ship's doctor was a strange fellow to come from Canada, the land of big men and rough. He looked like a schoolboy,

with small hands and feet and a pink complexion. On his left cheekbone was a large brown mole, covered with silky hair, and for some reason that seemed to make his face effeminate. It was easy to see why he had not been successful in private practice. He was like somebody trying to protect a raw surface from heat and cold; so cursed with diffidence, and so sensitive about his boyish appearance that he chose to shut himself up in an oscillating wooden coop on the sea. The long run to Australia had exactly suited him. A rough life and the pounding of bad weather had fewer terrors for him than an office in town, with constant exposure to human personalities.

"Have you tried him on malted milk?" he asked, when Claude had told him how Fanning's nourishment was threatened.

"Dr. Trueman hasn't a bottle left. How long do you figure we'll be at sea?"

"Four days; possibly five."

"Then Lieutenant Wheeler will lose his pal," said Dr. Trueman, who had just come in.

Chessup stood for a moment frowning and pulling nervously at the brass buttons on his coat. He slid the bolt on his door and turning to his colleague said resolutely: "I can give you some information, if you won't implicate me. You can do as you like, but keep my name out of it. For several hours last night cases of eggs and boxes of oranges were being carried into the Chief Steward's cabin by a flunky of his from the galley. Whatever port we make, he can get a shilling each for the fresh eggs, and perhaps sixpence for the oranges. They are your property, of course, furnished by your government; but this is his customary perquisite. I've been on this boat six

years, and it's always been so. About a week before we make port, the choicest of the remaining stores are taken to his cabin, and he disposes of them after we dock. I can't say just how he manages it, but he does. The skipper may know of this custom, and there may be some reason why he permits it. It's not my business to see anything. The Chief Steward is a powerful man on an English vessel. If he has anything against me, sooner or later he can lose my berth for me. There you have the facts."

"Have I your permission to go to the Chief Steward?" Dr. Trueman asked.

"Certainly not. But you can go without my knowledge. He's an ugly man to cross, and he can make it uncomfortable for you and your patients."

"Well, we'll say no more about it. I appreciate your telling me, and I will see that you don't get mixed up in this. Will you go down with me to look at that new meningitis case?"

Claude waited impatiently in his stateroom for the doctor's return. He didn't see why the Chief Steward shouldn't be exposed and dealt with like any other grafter. He had hated the man ever since he heard him berating the old bath steward one morning. Hawkins had made no attempt to defend himself, but stood like a dog that has been terribly beaten, trembling all over, saying "Yes, sir. Yes, sir," while his chief gave him a cold cursing in a low, snarling voice. Claude had never heard a man or even an animal addressed with such contempt. The Steward had a cruel face,— white as cheese, with limp, moist hair combed back from a high forehead,— the peculiarly oily hair that seems to grow only on the heads of stewards and waiters. His eyes were exactly the shape of almonds, but the

lids were so swollen that the dull pupil was visible only through a narrow slit. A long, pale moustache hung like a fringe over his loose lips.

When Dr. Trueman came back from the hospital, he declared he was now ready to call on Mr. Micks. "He's a nasty looking customer, but he can't do anything to me."

They went to the Chief Steward's cabin and knocked.

"What's wanted?" called a threatening voice.

The doctor made a grimace to his companion and walked in. The Steward was sitting at a big desk, covered with account books. He turned in his chair. "I beg your pardon," he said coldly, "I do not see any one here. I will be—"

The doctor held up his hand quickly. "That's all right, Steward. I'm sorry to intrude, but I've something I must say to you in private. I'll not detain you long." If he had hesitated for a moment, Claude believed the Steward would have thrown him out, but he went on rapidly. "This is Lieutenant Wheeler, Mr. Micks. His fellow officer lies very ill with pneumonia in stateroom 96. Lieutenant Wheeler has kept him alive by special nursing. He is not able to retain anything in his stomach but eggs and orange juice. If he has these, we may be able to keep up his strength till the fever breaks, and carry him to a hospital in France. If we can't get them for him, he will be dead within twenty-four hours. That's the situation."

The steward rose and turned out the drop-light on his desk. "Have you received notice that there are no more eggs and oranges on board? Then I am afraid there is nothing I can do for you. I did not provision this ship."

"No. I understand that. I believe the United States Government provided the fruit and eggs and meat. And I pos-

itively know that the articles I need for my patient are not exhausted. Without going into the matter further, I warn you that I'm not going to let a United States officer die when the means of saving him are procurable. I'll go to the skipper, I'll call a meeting of the army officers on board. I'll go any length to save this man."

"That is your own affair, but you will not interfere with me in the discharge of my duties. Will you leave my cabin?"

"In a moment, Steward. I know that last night a number of cases of eggs and oranges were carried into this room. They are here now, and they belong to the A. E. F. If you will agree to provision my man, what I know won't go any further. But if you refuse, I'll get this matter investigated. I won't stop till I do."

The Steward sat down, and took up a pen. His large, soft hand looked cheesy, like his face. "What is the number of the cabin?" he asked indifferently.

"Ninety-six."

"Exactly what do you require?"

"One dozen eggs and one dozen oranges every twenty-four hours, to be delivered at any time convenient to you."

"I will see what I can do."

The Steward did not look up from his writing pad, and his visitors left as abruptly as they had come.

At about four o'clock every morning, before even the bath stewards were on duty, there was a scratching at Claude's door, and a covered basket was left there by a messenger who was unwashed, half-naked, with a sacking apron tied round his middle and his hairy chest splashed with flour. He never spoke, had only one eye and an inflamed socket. Claude

learned that he was a half-witted brother of the Chief Steward, a potato-peeler and dish-washer in the galley.

Four days after their interview with Mr. Micks, when they were at last nearing the end of the voyage, Doctor Trueman detained Claude after medical inspection to tell him that the Chief Steward had come down with the epidemic. "He sent for me last night and asked me to take his case,— won't have anything to do with Chessup. I had to get Chessup's permission. He seemed very glad to hand the case over to me."

"Is he very bad?"

"He hasn't a look-in, and he knows it. Complications; chronic Bright's disease. It seems he has nine children. I'll try to get him into a hospital when we make port, but he'll only live a few days at most. I wonder who'll get the shillings for all the eggs and oranges he hoarded away. Claude, my boy," the doctor spoke with sudden energy, "if I ever set foot on land again, I'm going to forget this voyage like a bad dream. When I'm in normal health, I'm a Presbyterian, but just now I feel that even the wicked get worse than they deserve."

A day came at last when Claude was wakened from sleep by a sense of stillness. He sprang up with a dazed fear that some one had died; but Fanning lay in his berth, breathing quietly.

Something caught his eye through the porthole,— a great grey shoulder of land standing up in the pink light of dawn, powerful and strangely still after the distressing instability of the sea. Pale trees and long, low fortifications . . . close grey buildings with red roofs . . . little sailboats bounding seaward . . . up on the cliff a gloomy fortress.

He had always thought of his destination as a country shattered and desolated,—"bleeding France"; but he had never seen anything that looked so strong, so self-sufficient, so fixed from the first foundation, as the coast that rose before him. It was like a pillar of eternity. The ocean lay submissive at its feet, and over it was the great meekness of early morning.

This grey wall, unshaken, mighty, was the end of the long preparation, as it was the end of the sea. It was the reason for everything that had happened in his life for the last fifteen months. It was the reason why Tannhauser and the gentle Virginian, and so many others who had set out with him, were never to have any life at all, or even a soldier's death. They were merely waste in a great enterprise, thrown overboard like rotten ropes. For them this kind release,— trees and a still shore and quiet water,— was never, never to be. How long would their bodies toss, he wondered, in that inhuman kingdom of darkness and unrest?

He was startled by a weak voice from behind.

"Claude, are we over?"

"Yes, Fanning. We're over."

BOOK FIVE:

"BIDDING THE EAGLES OF THE WEST FLY ON"

I

AT noon that day Claude found himself in a street of little shops, hot and perspiring, utterly confused and turned about. Truck drivers and boys on bell-less bicycles shouted at him indignantly, furiously. He got under the shade of a young plane tree and stood close to the trunk, as if it might protect him. His greatest care, at any rate, was off his hands. With the help of Victor Morse he had hired a taxi for forty francs, taken Fanning to the base hospital, and seen him into the arms of a big orderly from Texas. He came away from the hospital with no idea where he was going — except that he wanted to get to the heart of the city. It seemed, however, to have no heart; only long, stony arteries, full of heat and noise. He was still standing there, under his plane tree, when a group of uncertain, lost-looking brown figures, headed by Sergeant Hicks, came weaving up the street; nine men in nine different attitudes of dejection, each with a long loaf of bread under his arm. They hailed Claude with joy, straightened up, and looked as if now they had found their way! He saw that he must be a plane tree for somebody else.

Sergeant Hicks explained that they had been trudging about the town, looking for cheese. After sixteen days of heavy, tasteless food, cheese was what they all wanted. There was a grocery store up the street, where there seemed to be everything else. He had tried to make the old woman understand by signs.

"Don't these French people eat cheese, anyhow? What's

their word for it, Lieutenant? I'm damned if I know, and I've lost my phrase book. Suppose you could make her understand?"

"Well, I'll try. Come along, boys."

Crowding close together, the ten men entered the shop. The proprietress ran forward with an exclamation of despair. Evidently she had thought she was done with them, and was not pleased to see them coming back. When she paused to take breath, Claude took off his hat respectfully, and performed the bravest act of his life; uttered the first phrase-book sentence he had ever spoken to a French person. His men were at his back; he had to say something or run, there was no other course. Looking the old woman in the eye, he steadily articulated:

"Avez-vous du fromage, Madame?" It was almost inspiration to add the last word, he thought; and when it worked, he was as much startled as if his revolver had gone off in his belt.

"Du fromage?" the shop woman screamed. Calling something to her daughter, who was at the desk, she caught Claude by the sleeve, pulled him out of the shop, and ran down the street with him. She dragged him into a doorway darkened by a long curtain, greeted the proprietress, and then pushed the men after their officer, as if they were stubborn burros.

They stood blinking in the gloom, inhaling a sour, damp, buttery, smear-kase smell, until their eyes penetrated the shadows and they saw that there was nothing but cheese and butter in the place. The shopkeeper was a fat woman, with black eyebrows that met above her nose; her sleeves were rolled up, her cotton dress was open over her white throat and bosom. She began at once to tell them that there was a restriction on

milk products; every one must have cards; she could not sell them so much. But soon there was nothing left to dispute about. The boys fell upon her stock like wolves. The little white cheeses that lay on green leaves disappeared into big mouths. Before she could save it, Hicks had split a big round cheese through the middle and was carving it up like a melon. She told them they were dirty pigs and worse than the Boches, but she could not stop them.

"What's the matter with Mother, Lieutenant? What's she fussing about? Ain't she here to sell goods?"

Claude tried to look wiser than he was. "From what I can make out, there's some sort of restriction; you aren't allowed to buy all you want. We ought to have thought about that; this is a war country. I guess we've about cleaned her out."

"Oh, that's all right," said Hicks wiping his clasp-knife. "We'll bring her some sugar tomorrow. One of the fellows who helped us unload at the docks told me you can always quiet 'em if you give 'em sugar."

They surrounded her and held out their money for her to take her pay. "Come on, ma'm, don't be bashful. What's the matter, ain't this good money?"

She was distracted by the noise they made, by their bronzed faces with white teeth and pale eyes, crowding so close to her. Ten large, well-shaped hands with straight fingers, the open palms full of crumpled notes. . . . Holding the men off under the pretence of looking for a pencil, she made rapid calculations. The money that lay in their palms had no relation to these big, coaxing, boisterous fellows; it was a joke to them; they didn't know what it meant in the world. Behind them were shiploads of money, and behind the ships. . . .

The situation was unfair. Whether she took much or little

out of their hands, couldn't possibly matter to the Americans,—couldn't even dash their good humour. But there was a strain on the cheesewoman, and the standards of a lifetime were in jeopardy. Her mind mechanically fixed upon two-and-a-half; she would charge them two-and-a-half times the market price of the cheese. With this moral plank to cling to, she made change with conscientious accuracy and did not keep a penny too much from anybody. Telling them what big stupids they were, and that it was necessary to learn to count in this world, she urged them out of her shop. She liked them well enough, but she did not like to do business with them. If she didn't take their money, the next one would. All the same, fictitious values were distasteful to her, and made everything seem flimsy and unsafe.

Standing in her doorway, she watched the brown band go ambling down the street; as they passed in front of the old church of St. Jacques, the two foremost stumbled on a sunken step that was scarcely above the level of the pavement. She laughed aloud. They looked back and waved to her. She replied with a smile that was both friendly and angry. She liked them, but not the legend of waste and prodigality that ran before them — and followed after. It was superfluous and disintegrating in a world of hard facts. An army in which the men had meat for breakfast, and ate more every day than the French soldiers at the front got in a week! Their moving kitchens and supply trains were the wonder of France. Down below Arles, where her husband's sister had married, on the desolate plain of the Crau, their tinned provisions were piled like mountain ranges, under sheds and canvas. Nobody had ever seen so much food before; coffee, milk, sugar, bacon, hams; everything the world was famished for. They brought

shiploads of useless things, too. And useless people. Shiploads of women who were not nurses; some said they came to dance with the officers, so they would not be *ennuyés*.

All this was not war,—any more than having money thrust at you by grown men who could not count, was business. It was an invasion, like the other. The first destroyed material possessions, and this threatened everybody's integrity. Distaste of such methods, deep, recoiling distrust of them, clouded the cheesewoman's brow as she threw her money into the drawer and turned the key on it.

As for the doughboys, having once stubbed their toes on the sunken step, they examined it with interest, and went in to explore the church. It was in their minds that they must not let a church escape, any more than they would let a Boche escape. Within they came upon a bunch of their shipmates, including the Kansas band, to whom they boasted that their Lieutenant could "speak French like a native."

The Lieutenant himself thought he was getting on pretty well, but a few hours later his pride was humbled. He was sitting alone in a little triangular park beside another church, admiring the cropped locust trees and watching some old women who were doing their mending in the shade. A little boy in a black apron, with a close-shaved, bare head, came along, skipping rope. He hopped lightly up to Claude and said in a most persuasive and confiding voice:

"Voulez-vous me dire l'heure, s'il vous plaît, M'sieu' l' soldat?"

Claude looked down into his admiring eyes with a feeling of panic. He wouldn't mind being dumb to a man, or even to a pretty girl, but this was terrible. His tongue went dry, and his face grew scarlet. The child's expectant gaze changed to

a look of doubt, and then of fear. He had spoken before to Americans who didn't understand, but they had not turned red and looked angry like this one; this soldier must be ill, or wrong in his head. The boy turned and ran away.

Many a serious mishap had distressed Claude less. He was disappointed, too. There was something friendly in the boy's face that he wanted . . . that he needed. As he rose he ground his heel into the gravel. "Unless I can learn to talk to the *children* of this country," he muttered, "I'll go home!"

II

CLAUDE set off to find the Grand Hotel, where he had promised to dine with Victor Morse. The porter there spoke English. He called a red-headed boy in a dirty uniform and told him to take the American to *vingt-quatre.* The boy also spoke English. "Plenty money in New York, I guess! In France, no money." He made their way, through musty corridors and up slippery staircases, as long as possible, shrewdly eyeing the visitor and rubbing his thumb nervously against his fingers all the while.

"*Vingt-quatre,* twen'y-four," he announced, rapping at a door with one hand and suggestively opening the other. Claude put something into it — anything to be rid of him.

Victor was standing before the fireplace. "Hello, Wheeler, come in. Our dinner will be served up here. It's big enough, isn't it? I could get nothing between a coop, and this at fifteen dollars a day."

The room was spacious enough for a banquet; with two huge beds, and great windows that swung in on hinges, like doors, and that had certainly not been washed since before the war. The heavy red cotton-brocade hangings and lace curtains were stiff with dust, the thick carpet was strewn with cigarette-ends and matches. Razor blades and "Khaki Comfort" boxes lay about on the dresser, and former occupants had left their autographs in the dust on the table. Officers slept there, and went away, and other officers arrived,— and the room remained the same, like a wood in which travellers camp for the night.

The *valet de chambre* carried away only what he could use; discarded shirts and socks and old shoes. It seemed a rather dismal place to have a party.

When the waiter came, he dusted off the table with his apron and put on a clean cloth, napkins, and glasses. Victor and his guest sat down under an electric light bulb with a broken shade, around which a silent halo of flies moved unceasingly. They did not buzz, or dart aloft, or descend to try the soup, but hung there in the centre of the room as if they were a part of the lighting system. The constant attendance of the waiter embarrassed Claude; he felt as if he were being watched.

"By the way," said Victor while the soup plates were being removed, "what do you think of this wine? It cost me thirty francs the bottle."

"It tastes very good to me," Claude replied. "But then, it's the first champagne I've ever drunk."

"Really?" Victor drank off another glass and sighed. "I envy you. I wish I had it all to do over. Life's too short, you know."

"I should say you had made a good beginning. We're a long way from Crystal Lake."

"Not far enough." His host reached across the table and filled Claude's empty glass. "I sometimes waken up with the feeling I'm back there. Or I have bad dreams, and find myself sitting on that damned stool in the glass cage and can't make my books balance; I hear the old man coughing in his private room, the way he coughs when he's going to refuse a loan to some poor devil who needs it. I've had a narrow escape, Wheeler; *as a brand from the burning.* That's all the Scripture I remember."

The bright red spots on Victor's cheeks, his pale forehead and brilliant eyes and saucy little moustaches seemed to give his quotation a peculiar vividness. Claude envied him. It must be great fun to take up a part and play it to a finish; to believe you were making yourself over, and to admire the kind of fellow you made. He, too, in a way, admired Victor, — though he couldn't altogether believe in him.

"You'll never go back," he said, "I wouldn't worry about that."

"Take it from me, there are thousands who will never go back! I'm not speaking of the casualties. Some of you Americans are likely to discover the world this trip . . . and it'll make the hell of a lot of difference! You boys never had a fair chance. There's a conspiracy of Church and State to keep you down. I'm going off to play with some girls tonight, will you come along?"

Claude laughed. "I guess not."

"Why not? You won't be caught, I guarantee."

"I guess not." Claude spoke apologetically. "I'm going out to see Fanning after dinner."

Victor shrugged. "That ass!" He beckoned the waiter to open another bottle and bring the coffee. "Well, it's your last chance to go nutting with me." He looked intently at Claude and lifted his glass. "To the future, and our next meeting!" When he put down his empty goblet he remarked, "I got a wire through today; I'm leaving tomorrow."

"For London?"

"For Verdun."

Claude took a quick breath. Verdun . . . the very sound of the name was grim, like the hollow roll of drums. Victor was going there tomorrow. Here one could take a train for

Verdun, or thereabouts, as at home one took a train for Omaha. He felt more "over" than he had done before, and a little crackle of excitement went all through him. He tried to be careless.

"Then you won't get to London soon?"

"God knows," Victor answered gloomily. He looked up at the ceiling and began to whistle softly an engaging air. "Do you know that? It's something Maisie often plays; 'Roses of Picardy.' You won't know what a woman can be till you meet her, Wheeler."

"I hope I'll have that pleasure. I was wondering if you'd forgotten her for the moment. She doesn't object to these — diversions?"

Victor lifted his eyebrows in the old haughty way. "Women don't require that sort of fidelity of the air service. Our engagements are too uncertain."

Half an hour later Victor had gone in quest of amorous adventure, and Claude was wandering alone in a brightly lighted street full of soldiers and sailors of all nations. There were black Senegalese, and Highlanders in kilts, and little lorry-drivers from Siam,— all moving slowly along between rows of cabarets and cinema theatres. The wide-spreading branches of the plane trees met overhead, shutting out the sky and roofing in the orange glare. The sidewalks were crowded with chairs and little tables, at which marines and soldiers sat drinking sirops and cognac and coffee. From every doorway music-machines poured out jazz tunes and strident Sousa marches. The noise was stupefying. Out in the middle of the street a band of bareheaded girls, hardy and tough looking, were following a string of awkward Americans, running into

them, elbowing them, asking for treats, crying, "You dance me Fausse-trot, Sammie?"

Claude stationed himself before a movie theatre, where the sign in electric lights read, *"Amour, quand tu nous tiens!"* and stood watching the people. In the stream that passed him, his eye lit upon two walking arm-in-arm, their hands clasped, talking eagerly and unconscious of the crowd,— different, he saw at once, from all the other strolling, affectionate couples.

The man wore the American uniform; his left arm had been amputated at the elbow, and he carried his head awry, as if he had a stiff neck. His dark, lean face wore an expression of intense anxiety, his eyebrows twitched as if he were in constant pain. The girl, too, looked troubled. As they passed him, under the red light of the *Amour* sign, Claude could see that her eyes were full of tears. They were wide, blue eyes, innocent looking, and she had the prettiest face he had seen since he landed. From her silk shawl, and little bonnet with blue strings and a white frill, he thought she must be a country girl. As she listened to the soldier, with her mouth half-open, he saw a space between her two front teeth, as with children whose second teeth have just come. While they pushed along in the crowd she looked up intently at the man beside her, or off into the blur of light, where she evidently saw nothing. Her face, young and soft, seemed new to emotion, and her bewildered look made one feel that she did not know where to turn.

Without realizing what he did, Claude followed them out of the crowd into a quiet street, and on into another, even more deserted, where the houses looked as if they had been asleep a long while. Here there were no street lamps, not

even a light in the windows, but natural darkness; with the moon high overhead throwing sharp shadows across the white cobble paving. The narrow street made a bend, and he came out upon the church he and his comrades had entered that afternoon. It looked larger by night, and but for the sunken step, he might not have been sure it was the same. The dark neighbouring houses seemed to lean toward it, the moonlight shone silver-grey upon its battered front.

The two walking before him ascended the steps and withdrew into the deep doorway, where they clung together in an embrace so long and still that it was like death. At last they drew shuddering apart. The girl sat down on the stone bench beside the door. The soldier threw himself upon the pavement at her feet, and rested his head on her knee, his one arm lying across her lap.

In the shadow of the houses opposite, Claude kept watch like a sentinel, ready to take their part if any alarm should startle them. The girl bent over her soldier, stroking his head so softly that she might have been putting him to sleep; took his one hand and held it against her bosom as if to stop the pain there. Just behind her, on the sculptured portal, some old bishop, with a pointed cap and a broken crozier, stood, holding up two fingers.

III

THE next morning when Claude arrived at the hospital to see Fanning, he found every one too busy to take account of him. The courtyard was full of ambulances, and a long line of camions waited outside the gate. A train-load of wounded Americans had come in, sent back from evacuation hospitals to await transportation home.

As the men were carried past him, he thought they looked as if they had been sick a long while — looked, indeed, as if they could never get well. The boys who died on board the *Anchises* had never seemed as sick as these did. Their skin was yellow or purple, their eyes were sunken, their lips sore. Everything that belonged to health had left them, every attribute of youth was gone. One poor fellow, whose face and trunk were wrapped in cotton, never stopped moaning, and as he was carried up the corridor he smelled horribly. The Texas orderly remarked to Claude, "In the beginning that one only had a finger blown off; would you believe it?"

These were the first wounded men Claude had seen. To shed bright blood, to wear the red badge of courage,— that was one thing; but to be reduced to this was quite another. Surely, the sooner these boys died, the better.

The Texan, passing with his next load, asked Claude why he didn't go into the office and wait until the rush was over. Looking in through the glass door, Claude noticed a young man writing at a desk enclosed by a railing. Something about his figure, about the way he held his head, was familiar.

When he lifted his left arm to prop open the page of his ledger, it was a stump below the elbow. Yes, there could be no doubt about it; the pale, sharp face, the beak nose, the frowning, uneasy brow. Presently, as if he felt a curious eye upon him, the young man paused in his rapid writing, wriggled his shoulders, put an iron paperweight on the page of his book, took a case from his pocket and shook a cigarette out on the table. Going up to the railing, Claude offered him a cigar. "No, thank you. I don't use them any more. They seem too heavy for me." He struck a match, moved his shoulders again as if they were cramped, and sat down on the edge of his desk.

"Where do these wounded men come from?" Claude asked. "I just got in on the *Anchises* yesterday."

"They come from various evacuation hospitals. I believe most of them are the Belleau Wood lot."

"Where did you lose your arm?"

"Cantigny. I was in the First Division. I'd been over since last September, waiting for something to happen, and then got fixed in my first engagement."

"Can't you go home?"

"Yes, I could. But I don't want to. I've got used to things over here. I was attached to Headquarters in Paris for awhile."

Claude leaned across the rail. "We read about Cantigny at home, of course. We were a good deal excited; I suppose you were?"

"Yes, we were nervous. We hadn't been under fire, and we'd been fed up on all that stuff about it's taking fifty years to build a fighting machine. The Hun had a strong position; we looked up that long hill and wondered how we were going

to behave." As he talked the boy's eyes seemed to be moving all the time, probably because he could not move his head at all. After blowing out deep clouds of smoke until his cigarette was gone, he sat down to his ledger and frowned at the page in a way which said he was too busy to talk.

Claude saw Dr. Trueman standing in the doorway, waiting for him. They made their morning call on Fanning, and left the hospital together. The Doctor turned to him as if he had something on his mind.

"I saw you talking to that wry-necked boy. How did he seem, all right?"

"Not exactly. That is, he seems very nervous. Do you know anything about him?"

"Oh, yes! He's a star patient here, a psychopathic case. I had just been talking to one of the doctors about him, when I came out and saw you with him. He was shot in the neck at Cantigny, where he lost his arm. The wound healed, but his memory is affected; some nerve cut, I suppose, that connects with that part of his brain. This psychopath, Phillips, takes a great interest in him and keeps him here to observe him. He's writing a book about him. He says the fellow has forgotten almost everything about his life before he came to France. The queer thing is, it's his recollection of women that is most affected. He can remember his father, but not his mother; doesn't know if he has sisters or not,—can remember seeing girls about the house, but thinks they may have been cousins. His photographs and belongings were lost when he was hurt, all except a bunch of letters he had in his pocket. They are from a girl he's engaged to, and he declares he can't remember her at all; doesn't know what she looks like or anything about her, and can't remember getting en-

gaged. The doctor has the letters. They seem to be from a nice girl in his own town who is very ambitious for him to make the most of himself. He deserted soon after he was sent to this hospital, ran away. He was found on a farm out in the country here, where the sons had been killed and the people had sort of adopted him. He'd quit his uniform and was wearing the clothes of one of the dead sons. He'd probably have got away with it, if he hadn't had that wry neck. Some one saw him in the fields and recognized him and reported him. I guess nobody cared much but this psychopathic doctor; he wanted to get his pet patient back. They call him 'the lost American' here."

"He seems to be doing some sort of clerical work," Claude observed discreetly.

"Yes, they say he's very well educated. He remembers the books he has read better than his own life. He can't recall what his home town looks like, or his home. And the women are clear wiped out, even the girl he was going to marry."

Claude smiled. "Maybe he's fortunate in that."

The Doctor turned to him affectionately, "Now Claude, don't begin to talk like that the minute you land in this country."

Claude walked on past the church of St. Jacques. Last night already seemed like a dream, but it haunted him. He wished he could do something to help that boy; help him get away from the doctor who was writing a book about him, and the girl who wanted him to make the most of himself; get away and be lost altogether in what he had been lucky enough to find. All day, as Claude came and went, he looked among the crowds for that young face, so compassionate and tender.

IV

DEEPER and deeper into flowery France! That was the sentence Claude kept saying over to himself to the jolt of the wheels, as the long troop train went southward, on the second day after he and his company had left the port of debarkation. Fields of wheat, fields of oats, fields of rye; all the low hills and rolling uplands clad with harvest. And everywhere, in the grass, in the yellowing grain, along the road-bed, the poppies spilling and streaming. On the second day the boys were still calling to each other about the poppies; nothing else had so entirely surpassed their expectations. They had supposed that poppies grew only on battle fields, or in the brains of war correspondents. Nobody knew what the cornflowers were, except Willy Katz, an Austrian boy from the Omaha packing-houses, and he knew only an objectionable name for them, so he offered no information. For a long time they thought the red clover blossoms were wild flowers,— they were as big as wild roses. When they passed the first alfalfa field, the whole train rang with laughter; alfalfa was one thing, they believed, that had never been heard of outside their own prairie states.

All the way down, Company B had been finding the old things instead of the new,— or, to their way of thinking, the new things instead of the old. The thatched roofs they had so counted upon seeing were few and far between. But American binders, of well-known makes, stood where the fields were beginning to ripen,— and they were being oiled

and put in order, not by "peasants," but by wise-looking old farmers who seemed to know their business. Pear trees, trained like vines against the wall, did not astonish them half so much as the sight of the familiar cottonwood, growing everywhere. Claude thought he had never before realized how beautiful this tree could be. In verdant little valleys, along the clear rivers, the cottonwoods waved and rustled; and on the little islands, of which there were so many in these rivers, they stood in pointed masses, seemed to grip deep into the soil and to rest easy, as if they had been there for ever and would be there for ever more. At home, all about Frankfort, the farmers were cutting down their cottonwoods because they were "common," planting maples and ash trees to struggle along in their stead. Never mind; the cottonwoods were good enough for France, and they were good enough for him! He felt they were a real bond between him and this people.

When B Company had first got their orders to go into a training camp in north-central France, all the men were disappointed. Troops much rawer than they were being rushed to the front, so why fool around any longer? But now they were reconciled to the delay. There seemed to be a good deal of France that wasn't the war, and they wouldn't mind travelling about a little in a country like this. Was the harvest always a month later than at home, as it seemed to be this year? Why did the farmers have rows of trees growing along the edges of every field — didn't they take the strength out of the soil? What did the farmers mean by raising patches of mustard right along beside other crops? Didn't they know that mustard got into wheat fields and strangled the grain?

The second night the boys were to spend in Rouen, and they would have the following day to look about. Everybody knew what had happened at Rouen — if any one didn't, his neighbours were only too eager to inform him! It had happened in the market-place, and the market-place was what they were going to find.

Tomorrow, when it came, proved to be black and cold, a day of pouring rain. As they filed through the narrow, crowded streets, that harsh Norman city presented no very cheering aspect. They were glad, at last, to find the waterside, to go out on the bridge and breathe the air in the great open space over the river, away from the clatter of cart-wheels and the hard voices and crafty faces of these townspeople, who seemed rough and unfriendly. From the bridge they looked up at the white chalk hills, the tops a blur of intense green under the low, lead-coloured sky. They watched the fleets of broad, deep-set river barges, coming and going under their feet, with tilted smoke-stacks. Only a little way up that river was Paris, the place where every doughboy meant to go; and as they leaned on the rail and looked down at the slow-flowing water, each one had in his mind a confused picture of what it would be like. The Seine, they felt sure, must be very much wider there, and it was spanned by many bridges, all longer than the bridge over the Missouri at Omaha. There would be spires and golden domes past counting, all the buildings higher than anything in Chicago, and brilliant — dazzlingly brilliant, nothing grey and shabby about it like this old Rouen. They attributed to the city of their desire incalculable immensity, bewildering vastness, Babylonian hugeness and heaviness—the only attributes they had been taught to admire.

Late in the morning Claude found himself alone before the

Church of St. Ouen. He was hunting for the Cathedral, and this looked as if it might be the right place. He shook the water from his raincoat and entered, removing his hat at the door. The day, so dark without, was darker still within; . . . far away, a few scattered candles, still little points of light . . . just before him, in the grey twilight, slender white columns in long rows, like the stems of silver poplars.

The entrance to the nave was closed by a cord, so he walked up the aisle on the right, treading softly, passing chapels where solitary women knelt in the light of a few tapers. Except for them, the church was empty . . . empty. His own breathing was audible in this silence. He moved with caution lest he should wake an echo.

When he reached the choir he turned, and saw, far behind him, the rose window, with its purple heart. As he stood staring, hat in hand, as still as the stone figures in the chapels, a great bell, up aloft, began to strike the hour in its deep, melodious throat; eleven beats, measured and far apart, as rich as the colours in the window, then silence . . . only in his memory the throbbing of an undreamed-of quality of sound. The revelations of the glass and the bell had come almost simultaneously, as if one produced the other; and both were superlatives toward which his mind had always been groping,— or so it seemed to him then.

In front of the choir the nave was open, with no rope to shut it off. Several straw chairs were huddled on a flag of the stone floor. After some hesitation he took one, turned it round, and sat down facing the window. If some one should come up to him and say anything, anything at all, he would rise and say, *"Pardon, Monsieur; je ne sais pas c'est defendu."* He repeated this to himself to be quite sure he had it ready.

On the train, coming down, he had talked to the boys about the bad reputation Americans had acquired for slouching all over the place and butting in on things, and had urged them to tread lightly. "But Lieutenant," the kid from Pleasantville had piped up, "isn't this whole Expedition a butt-in? After all, it ain't our war." Claude laughed, but he told him he meant to make an example of the fellow who went to rough-housing.

He was well satisfied that he hadn't his restless companions on his mind now. He could sit here quietly until noon, and hear the bell strike again. In the meantime, he must try to think: This was, of course, Gothic architecture; he had read more or less about that, and ought to be able to remember something. Gothic . . . that was a mere word; to him it suggested something very peaked and pointed,— sharp arches, steep roofs. It had nothing to do with these slim white columns that rose so straight and far,— or with the window, burning up there in its vault of gloom. . . .

While he was vainly trying to think about architecture, some recollection of old astronomy lessons brushed across his brain,— something about stars whose light travels through space for hundreds of years before it reaches the earth and the human eye. The purple and crimson and peacock-green of this window had been shining quite as long as that before it got to him. . . . He felt distinctly that it went through him and farther still . . . as if his mother were looking over his shoulder. He sat solemnly through the hour until twelve, his elbows on his knees, his conical hat swinging between them in his hand, looking up through the twilight with candid, thoughtful eyes.

When Claude joined his company at the station, they had the laugh on him. They had found the Cathedral,— and a

statue of Richard the Lion-hearted, over the spot where the lion-heart itself was buried; "the identical organ," fat Sergeant Hicks assured him. But they were all glad to leave Rouen.

V

B COMPANY reached the training camp at S—— thirty-six men short: twenty-five they had buried on the voyage over, and eleven sick were left at the base hospital. The company was to be attached to a battalion which had already seen service, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Scott. Arriving early in the morning, the officers reported at once to Headquarters. Captain Maxey must have suffered a shock when the Colonel rose from his desk to acknowledge his salute, then shook hands with them all around and asked them about their journey. The Colonel was not a very martial figure; short, fat, with slouching shoulders, and a lumpy back like a sack of potatoes. Though he wasn't much over forty, he was bald, and his collar would easily slip over his head without being unbuttoned. His little twinkling eyes and good-humoured face were without a particle of arrogance or official dignity.

Years ago, when General Pershing, then a handsome young Lieutenant with a slender waist and yellow moustaches, was stationed as Commandant at the University of Nebraska, Walter Scott was an officer in a company of cadets the Lieutenant took about to military tournaments. The Pershing Rifles, they were called, and they won prizes wherever they went. After his graduation, Scott settled down to running a hardware business in a thriving Nebraska town, and sold gas ranges and garden hose for twenty years. About the time Pershing was sent to the Mexican border, Scott began to think there might eventually be something in the wind, and that he

would better get into training. He went down to Texas with the National Guard. He had come to France with the First Division, and had won his promotions by solid, soldierly qualities.

"I see you're an officer short, Captain Maxey," the Colonel remarked at their conference. "I think I've got a man here to take his place. Lieutenant Gerhardt is a New York man, came over in the band and got transferred to infantry. He has lately been given a commission for good service. He's had some experience and is a capable fellow." The Colonel sent his orderly out to bring in a young man whom he introduced to the officers as Lieutenant David Gerhardt.

Claude had been ashamed of Tod Fanning, who was always showing himself a sap-head, and who would never have got a commission if his uncle hadn't been a Congressman. But the moment he met Lieutenant Gerhardt's eye, something like jealousy flamed up in him. He felt in a flash that he suffered by comparison with the new officer; that he must be on his guard and must not let himself be patronized.

As they were leaving the Colonel's office together, Gerhardt asked him whether he had got his billet. Claude replied that after the men were in their quarters, he would look out for something for himself.

The young man smiled. "I'm afraid you may have difficulty. The people about here have been overworked, keeping soldiers, and they are not willing as they once were. I'm with a nice old couple over in the village. I'm almost sure I can get you in there. If you'll come along, we'll speak to them, before some one else is put off on them."

Claude didn't want to go, didn't want to accept favours,—nevertheless he went. They walked together along a dusty

road that ran between half-ripe wheatfields, bordered with poplar trees. The wild morning-glories and Queen Anne's lace that grew by the road-side were still shining with dew. A fresh breeze stirred the bearded grain, parting it in furrows and fanning out streaks of crimson poppies. The new officer was not intrusive, certainly. He walked along, whistling softly to himself, seeming quite lost in the freshness of the morning, or in his own thoughts. There had been nothing patronizing in his manner so far, and Claude began to wonder why he felt ill at ease with him. Perhaps it was because he did not look like the rest of them. Though he was young, he did not look boyish. He seemed experienced; a finished product, rather than something on the way. He was handsome, and his face, like his manner and his walk, had something distinguished about it. A broad white forehead under reddish brown hair, hazel eyes with no uncertainty in their look, an aquiline nose, finely cut,— a sensitive, scornful mouth, which somehow did not detract from the kindly, though slightly reserved, expression of his face.

Lieutenant Gerhardt must have been in this neighbourhood for some time; he seemed to know the people. On the road they passed several villagers; a rough-looking girl taking a cow out to graze, an old man with a basket on his arm, the postman on his bicycle;— they all spoke to Claude's companion as if they knew him well.

"What are these blue flowers that grow about everywhere?" Claude asked suddenly, pointing to a clump with his foot.

"Cornflowers," said the other. "The Germans call them *Kaiser-blumen.*"

They were approaching the village, which lay on the edge of a wood,— a wood so large one could not see the end of it;

it met the horizon with a ridge of pines. The village was but a single street. On either side ran clay-coloured walls, with painted wooden doors here and there, and green shutters. Claude's guide opened one of these gates, and they walked into a little sanded garden; the house was built round it on three sides. Under a cherry tree sat a woman in a black dress, sewing, a work table beside her.

She was fifty, perhaps, but though her hair was grey she had a look of youthfulness; thin cheeks, delicately flushed with pink, and quiet, smiling, intelligent eyes. Claude thought she looked like a New England woman,—like the photographs of his mother's cousins and schoolmates. Lieutenant Gerhardt introduced him to Madame Joubert. He was quite disheartened by the colloquy that followed. Clearly his new fellow officer spoke Madame Joubert's perplexing language as readily as she herself did, and he felt irritated and grudging as he listened. He had been hoping that, wherever he stayed, he could learn to talk to the people a little; but with this accomplished young man about, he would never have the courage to try. He could see that Mme. Joubert liked Gerhardt, liked him very much; and all this, for some reason, discouraged him.

Gerhardt turned to Claude, speaking in a way which included Madame Joubert in the conversation, though she could not understand it: "Madame Joubert will let you come, although she has done her part and really doesn't have to take any one else in. But you will be so well off here that I'm glad she consents. You will have to share my room, but there are two beds. She will show you."

Gerhardt went out of the gate and left him alone with his hostess. Her mind seemed to read his thoughts. When he

uttered a word, or any sound that resembled one, she quickly and smoothly made a sentence of it, as if she were quite accustomed to talking in this way and expected only monosyllables from strangers. She was kind, even a little playful with him; but he felt it was all good manners, and that underneath she was not thinking of him at all. When he was alone in the tile-floored sleeping room upstairs, unrolling his blankets and arranging his shaving things, he looked out of the window and watched her where she sat sewing under the cherry tree. She had a very sad face, he thought; it wasn't grief, nothing sharp and definite like sorrow. It was an old, quiet, impersonal sadness, — sweet in its expression, like the sadness of music.

As he came out of the house to start back to the barracks, he bowed to her and tried to say, *"Au revoir, Madame. Jusq' au ce soir."* He stopped near the kitchen door to look at a many-branched rose vine that ran all over the wall, full of cream-coloured, pink-tipped roses, just a shade stronger in colour than the clay wall behind them. Madame Joubert came over and stood beside him, looking at him and at the *rosier*. *"Oui, c'est joli, n'est-ce pas?"* She took the scissors that hung by a ribbon from her belt, cut one of the flowers and stuck it in his buttonhole. *"Voilà."* She made a little flourish with her thin hand.

Stepping into the street, he turned to shut the wooden door after him, and heard a soft stir in the dark tool-house at his elbow. From among the rakes and spades a child's frightened face was staring out at him. She was sitting on the ground with her lap full of baby kittens. He caught but a glimpse of her dull, pale face.

VI

THE next morning Claude awoke with such a sense of physical well-being as he had not had for a long time. The sun was shining brightly on the white plaster walls and on the red tiles of the floor. Green jalousies, half-drawn, shaded the upper part of the two windows. Through their slats, he could see the forking branches of an old locust tree that grew by the gate. A flock of pigeons flew over it, dipping and mounting with a sharp twinkle of silver wings. It was good to lie again in a house that was cared for by women. He must have felt that even in his sleep, for when he opened his eyes he was thinking about Mahailey and breakfast and summer mornings on the farm. The early stillness was sweet, and the feeling of dry, clean linen against his body. There was a smell of lavender about his warm pillow. He lay still for fear of waking Lieutenant Gerhardt. This was the sort of peace one wanted to enjoy alone. When he rose cautiously on his elbow and looked at the other bed, it was empty. His companion must have dressed and slipped out when day first broke. Somebody else who liked to enjoy things alone; that looked hopeful. But now that he had the place to himself, he decided to get up.

While he was dressing he could see old M. Joubert down in the garden, watering the plants and vines, raking the sand fresh and smooth, clipping off dead leaves and withered flowers and throwing them into a wheelbarrow. These people had lost both their sons in the war, he had been told, and now they were taking care of the property for their grandchildren.

— two daughters of the elder son. Claude saw Gerhardt come into the garden, and sit down at the table under the trees, where they had their dinner last night. He hurried down to join him. Gerhardt made room for him on the bench.

"Do you always sleep like that? It's an accomplishment. I made enough noise when I dressed,— kept dropping things, but it never reached you."

Madame Joubert came out of the kitchen in a purple flowered morning gown, her hair in curl-papers under a lace cap. She brought the coffee herself, and they sat down at the unpainted table without a cloth, and drank it out of big crockery bowls. They had fresh milk with it,— the first Claude had tasted in a long while, and sugar which Gerhardt produced from his pocket. The old cook had her coffee sitting in the kitchen door, and on the step, at her feet, sat the strange, pale little girl.

Madame Joubert amiably addressed herself to Claude; she knew that Americans were accustomed to a different sort of morning repast, and if he wished to bring bacon from the camp, she would gladly cook it for him. She had even made pancakes for officers who stayed there before. She seemed pleased, however, to learn that Claude had had enough of these things for awhile. She called David by his first name, pronouncing it the French way, and when Claude said he hoped she would do as much for him, she said, Oh, yes, that his was a very good French name, *"mais un peu, un peu . . . romanesque,"* at which he blushed, not quite knowing whether she were making fun of him or not.

"It is rather so in English, isn't it?" David asked.

"Well, it's a sissy name, if you mean that."

"Yes, it is, a little," David admitted candidly.

The day's work on the parade ground was hard, and Captain Maxey's men were soft, felt the heat,—didn't size up well with the Kansas boys who had been hardened by service. The Colonel wasn't pleased with B Company and detailed them to build new barracks and extend the sanitation system. Claude got out and worked with the men. Gerhardt followed his example, but it was easy to see that he had never handled lumber or tin-roofing before. A kind of rivalry seemed to have sprung up between him and Claude, neither of them knew why.

Claude could see that the sergeants and corporals were a little uncertain about Gerhardt. His laconic speech, never embroidered by the picturesque slang they relished, his gravity, and his rare, incredulous smile, alike puzzled them. Was the new officer a dude? Sergeant Hicks asked of his chum, Dell Able. No, he wasn't a dude. Was he a swell-head? No, not at all; but he wasn't a good mixer. He was "an Easterner"; what more he was would develop later. Claude sensed something unusual about him. He suspected that Gerhardt knew a good many things as well as he knew French, and that he tried to conceal it, as people sometimes do when they feel they are not among their equals; this idea nettled him. It was Claude who seized the opportunity to be patronizing, when Gerhardt betrayed that he was utterly unable to select lumber by given measurements.

The next afternoon, work on the new barracks was called off because of rain. Sergeant Hicks set about getting up a boxing match, but when he went to invite the lieutenants, they had both disappeared. Claude was tramping toward the village, determined to get into the big wood that had tempted him ever since his arrival.

The highroad became the village street, and then, at the edge of the wood, became a country road again. A little farther on, where the shade grew denser, it split up into three wagon trails, two of them faint and little used. One of these Claude followed. The rain had dwindled to a steady patter, but the tall brakes growing up in the path splashed him to the middle, and his feet sank in spongy, mossy earth. The light about him, the very air, was green. The trunks of the trees were overgrown with a soft green moss, like mould. He was wondering whether this forest was not always a damp, gloomy place, when suddenly the sun broke through and shattered the whole wood with gold. He had never seen anything like the quivering emerald of the moss, the silky green of the dripping beech-tops. Everything woke up; rabbits ran across the path, birds began to sing, and all at once the brakes were full of whirring insects.

The winding path turned again, and came out abruptly on a hillside, above an open glade piled with grey boulders. On the opposite rise of ground stood a grove of pines, with bare, red stems. The light, around and under them, was red like a rosy sunset. Nearly all the stems divided about half-way up into two great arms, which came together again at the top, like the pictures of old Grecian lyres.

Down in the grassy glade, among the piles of flint boulders, little white birches shook out their shining leaves in the lightly moving air. All about the rocks were patches of purple heath; it ran up into the crevices between them like fire. On one of these bald rocks sat Lieutenant Gerhardt, hatless, in an attitude of fatigue or of deep dejection, his hands clasped about his knees, his bronze hair ruddy in the sun. After watching

him for a few minutes, Claude descended the slope, swishing the tall ferns.

"Will I be in the way?" he asked as he stopped at the foot of the rocks.

"Oh, no!" said the other, moving a little and unclasping his hands.

Claude sat down on a boulder. "Is this heather?" he asked. "I thought I recognized it, from 'Kidnapped.' This part of the world is not as new to you as it is to me."

"No. I lived in Paris for several years when I was a student."

"What were you studying?"

"The violin."

"You are a musician?" Claude looked at him wonderingly.

"I was," replied the other with a disdainful smile, languidly stretching out his legs in the heather.

"That seems too bad," Claude remarked gravely.

"What does?"

"Why, to take fellows with a special talent. There are enough of us who haven't any."

Gerhardt rolled over on his back and put his hands under his head. "Oh, this affair is too big for exceptions; it's universal. If you happened to be born twenty-six years ago, you couldn't escape. If this war didn't kill you in one way, it would in another." He told Claude he had trained at Camp Dix, and had come over eight months ago in a regimental band, but he hated the work he had to do and got transferred to the infantry.

When they retraced their steps, the wood was full of green twilight. Their relations had changed somewhat during the

last half hour, and they strolled in confidential silence up the home-like street to the door of their own garden.

Since the rain was over, Madame Joubert had laid the cloth on the plank table under the cherry tree, as on the previous evenings. Monsieur was bringing the chairs, and the little girl was carrying out a pile of heavy plates. She rested them against her stomach and leaned back as she walked, to balance them. She wore shoes, but no stockings, and her faded cotton dress switched about her brown legs. She was a little Belgian refugee who had been sent there with her mother. The mother was dead now, and the child would not even go to visit her grave. She could not be coaxed from the court-yard into the quiet street. If the neighbour children came into the garden on an errand, she hid herself. She would have no playmates but the cat; and now she had the kittens in the tool house.

Dinner was very cheerful that evening. M. Joubert was pleased that the storm had not lasted long enough to hurt the wheat. The garden was fresh and bright after the rain. The cherry tree shook down bright drops on the tablecloth when the breeze stirred. The mother cat dozed on the red cushion in Madame Joubert's sewing chair, and the pigeons fluttered down to snap up earthworms that wriggled in the wet sand. The shadow of the house fell over the dinner-table, but the tree-tops stood up in full sunlight, and the yellow sun poured on the earth wall and the cream-coloured roses. Their petals, ruffled by the rain, gave out a wet, spicy smell.

M. Joubert must have been ten years older than his wife. There was a great contentment in his manner and a pleasant sparkle in his eye. He liked the young officers. Gerhardt had been there more than two weeks, and somewhat relieved

the stillness that had settled over the house since the second son died in hospital. The Jouberts had dropped out of things. They had done all they could do, given all they had, and now they had nothing to look forward to,— except the event to which all France looked forward. The father was talking to Gerhardt about the great sea-port the Americans were making of Bordeaux; he said he meant to go there after the war, to see it all for himself.

Madame Joubert was pleased to hear that they had been walking in the wood. And was the heather in bloom? She wished they had brought her some. Next time they went, perhaps. She used to walk there often. Her eyes seemed to come nearer to them, Claude thought, when she spoke of it, and she evidently cared a great deal more about what was blooming in the wood than about what the Americans were doing on the Garonne. He wished he could talk to her as Gerhardt did. He admired the way she roused herself and tried to interest them, speaking her difficult language with such spirit and precision. It was a language that couldn't be mumbled; that had to be spoken with energy and fire, or not spoken at all. Merely speaking that exacting tongue would help to rally a broken spirit, he thought.

The little maid who served them moved about noiselessly. Her dull eyes never seemed to look; yet she saw when it was time to bring the heavy soup tureen, and when it was time to take it away. Madame Joubert had found that Claude liked his potatoes with his meat — when there was meat — and not in a course by themselves. She had each time to tell the little girl to go and fetch them. This the child did with manifest reluctance,— sullenly, as if she were being forced to do something wrong. She was a very strange little creature, altogether. As the two soldiers left the table and started for the camp, Claude

reached down into the tool house and took up one of the kittens, holding it out in the light to see it blink its eyes. The little girl, just coming out of the kitchen, uttered a shrill scream, a really terrible scream, and squatted down, covering her face with her hands. Madame Joubert came out to chide her.

"What is the matter with that child?" Claude asked as they hurried out of the gate. "Do you suppose she was hurt, or abused in some way?"

"Terrorized. She often screams like that at night. Haven't you heard her? They have to go and wake her, to stop it. She doesn't speak any French; only Walloon. And she can't or won't learn, so they can't tell what goes on in her poor little head."

In the two weeks of intensive training that followed, Claude marvelled at Gerhardt's spirit and endurance. The muscular strain of mimic trench operations was more of a tax on him than on any of the other officers. He was as tall as Claude, but he weighed only a hundred and forty-six pounds, and he had not been roughly bred like most of the others. When his fellow officers learned that he was a violinist by profession, that he could have had a soft job as interpreter or as an organizer of camp entertainments, they no longer resented his reserve or his occasional superciliousness. They respected a man who could have wriggled out and didn't.

VII

ON the march at last; through a brilliant August day Colonel Scott's battalion was streaming along one of the dusty, well-worn roads east of the Somme, their railway base well behind them. The way led through rolling country; fields, hills, woods, little villages shattered but still habitable, where the people came out to watch the soldiers go by.

The Americans went through every village in march step, colours flying, the band playing, "to show that the morale was high," as the officers said. Claude trudged on the outside of the column,— now at the front of his company, now at the rear,— wearing a stoical countenance, afraid of betraying his satisfaction in the men, the weather, the country.

They were bound for the big show, and on every hand were reassuring signs: long lines of gaunt, dead trees, charred and torn; big holes gashed out in fields and hillsides, already half concealed by new undergrowth; winding depressions in the earth, bodies of wrecked motor-trucks and automobiles lying along the road, and everywhere endless straggling lines of rusty barbed-wire, that seemed to have been put there by chance,— with no purpose at all.

"Begins to look like we're getting in, Lieutenant," said Sergeant Hicks, smiling behind his salute.

Claude nodded and passed forward.

"Well, we can't arrive any too soon for us, boys?" The Sergeant looked over his shoulder, and they grinned, their teeth

flashing white in their red, perspiring faces. Claude didn't wonder that everybody along the route, even the babies, came out to see them; he thought they were the finest sight in the world. This was the first day they had worn their tin hats; Gerhardt had shown them how to stuff grass and leaves inside to keep their heads cool. When they fell into fours, and the band struck up as they approached a town, Bert Fuller, the boy from Pleasantville on the Platte, who had blubbered on the voyage over, was guide right, and whenever Claude passed him his face seemed to say, "You won't get anything on me in a hurry, Lieutenant!"

They made camp early in the afternoon, on a hill covered with half-burned pines. Claude took Bert and Dell Able and Oscar the Swede, and set off to make a survey and report the terrain. Behind the hill, under the burned edge of the wood, they found an abandoned farmhouse and what seemed to be a clean well. It had a solid stone curb about it, and a wooden bucket hanging by a rusty wire. When the boys splashed the bucket about, the water sent up a pure, cool breath. But they were wise boys, and knew where dead Prussians most loved to hide. Even the straw in the stable they regarded with suspicion, and thought it would be just as well not to bed anybody there.

Swinging on to the right to make their circuit, they got into mud; a low field where the drain ditches had been neglected and had overflowed. There they came upon a pitiful group of humanity, bemired. A woman, ill and wretched looking, sat on a fallen log at the end of the marsh, a baby in her lap and three children hanging about her. She was far gone in consumption; one had only to listen to her breathing and to look at her white, perspiring face to feel how weak she was. Draggled, mud to the knees, she was trying to nurse her baby, half hidden under

an old black shawl. She didn't look like a tramp woman, but like one who had once been able to take proper care of herself, and she was still young. The children were tired and discouraged. One little boy wore a clumsy blue jacket, made from a French army coat. The other wore a battered American Stetson that came down over his ears. He carried, in his two arms, a pink celluloid clock. They all looked up and waited for the soldiers to do something.

Claude approached the woman, and touching the rim of his helmet, began: *"Bonjour, Madame. Qu'est que c'est?"*

She tried to speak, but went off into a spasm of coughing, only able to gasp, " 'Toinette, 'Toinette!"

'Toinette stepped quickly forward. She was about eleven, and seemed to be the captain of the party. A bold, hard little face with a long chin, straight black hair tied with rags, uneasy, crafty eyes; she looked much less gentle and more experienced than her mother. She began to explain, and she was very clever at making herself understood. She was used to talking to foreign soldiers,—spoke slowly, with emphasis and ingenious gestures.

She, too, had been reconnoitering. She had discovered the empty farmhouse and was trying to get her party there for the night. How did they come here? Oh, they were refugees. They had been staying with people thirty kilometers from here. They were trying to get back to their own village. Her mother was very sick, *presque morte,* and she wanted to go home to die. They had heard people were still living there; an old aunt was living in their own cellar,—and so could they if they once got there. The point was, and she made it over and over, that her mother wished to die *chez elle, comprenez-vous?* They had

no papers, and the French soldiers would never let them pass, but now that the Americans were here they hoped to get through; the Americans were said to be *toujours gentils.*

While she talked in her shrill, clicking voice, the baby began to howl, dissatisfied with its nourishment. The little girl shrugged. *"Il est toujours en colère,"* she muttered. The woman turned it around with difficulty — it seemed a big, heavy baby, but white and sickly—and gave it the other breast. It began sucking her noisily, rooting and sputtering as if it were famished. It was too painful, it was almost indecent, to see this exhausted woman trying to feed her baby. Claude beckoned his men away to one side, and taking the little girl by the hand drew her after them.

"Il faut que votre mère || se reposer," he told her, with the grave caesural pause which he always made in the middle of a French sentence. She understood him. No distortion of her native tongue surprised or perplexed her. She was accustomed to being addressed in all persons, numbers, genders, tenses; by Germans, English, Americans. She only listened to hear whether the voice was kind, and with men in this uniform it usually was kind.

Had they anything to eat? *Vous avez quelque chose à manger?*

"Rien. Rien du tout."

Wasn't her mother *trop malade à marcher?*

She shrugged; Monsieur could see for himself.

And her father?

He was dead; *mort à la Marne, en quatorze.*

"At the Marne?" Claude repeated, glancing in perplexity at the nursing baby.

Her dark eyes followed him and she instantly divined his code. "The baby?" she said quickly. "If the baby is on my lap now, he is a brute."

For a moment Claude did not understand. She repeated her explanation impatiently, something disdainful and sinister in her metallic little voice. A slow blush mounted to his forehead.

He pushed her toward her mother, "*Attendez là.*"

"I guess we'll have to get them over to that farmhouse," he told the men. He repeated what he had got of the child's story. When he came to her laconic statement about the baby, they looked at each other. Bert Fuller was afraid he might cry again, so he kept muttering, "By God, if we'd a-got here sooner, by God if we had!" as they ran back along the ditch.

Dell and Oscar made a chair of their crossed hands and carried the woman, — she was no great weight. Bert picked up the little boy with the pink clock; "Come along, little frog, your legs ain't long enough."

Claude walked behind, holding the screaming baby stiffly in his arms. How was it possible for a baby to have such definite personality, he asked himself, and how was it possible to dislike a baby so much? He hated it for its square, tow-thatched head and bloodless ears, and carried it with loathing . . . no wonder it cried! When it got nothing by screaming and stiffening, however, it suddenly grew quiet; regarded him with pale blue eyes, and tried to make itself comfortable against his khaki coat. It put out a grimy little fist and took hold of one of his buttons. "Damned, eh?" he muttered, glaring at the infant. "Cut it out!"

Before they had their own supper that night, the boys carried hot food and blankets down to their family.

VIII

FOUR o'clock . . . a summer dawn . . . his first morning in the trenches.

Claude had just been along the line to see that the gun teams were in position. This hour, when the light was changing, was a favourite time for attack. He had come in late last night, and had everything to learn. Mounting the fire-step, he peeped over the parapet between the sandbags, into the low, twisting mist. Just then he could see nothing but the wire entanglement, with birds hopping along the top wire, singing and chirping as they did on the wire fences at home. Clear and flute-like they sounded in the heavy air,— and they were the only sounds. A little breeze came up, slowly clearing the mist away. Streaks of green showed through the moving banks of vapour. The birds became more agitated.

That dull stretch of grey and green was No Man's Land. Those low, zigzag mounds, like giant molehills protected by wire hurdles, were the Hun trenches; five or six lines of them. He could easily follow the communication trenches without a glass. At one point their front line could not be more than eighty yards away, at another it must be all of three hundred. Here and there thin columns of smoke began to rise; the Hun was getting breakfast; everything was comfortable and natural. Behind the enemy's position the country rose gradually for several miles, with ravines and little woods, where, according to his map, they had masked artillery. Back on the

hills were ruined farmhouses and broken trees, but nowhere a living creature in sight. It was a dead, nerveless countryside, sunk in quiet and dejection. Yet everywhere the ground was full of men. Their own trenches, from the other side, must look quite as dead. Life was a secret, these days.

It was amazing how simply things could be done. His battalion had marched in quietly at midnight, and the line they came to relieve had set out as silently for the rear. It all took place in utter darkness. Just as B Company slid down an incline into the shallow rear trenches, the country was lit for a moment by two star shells, there was a rattling of machine guns, German Maxims,—a sporadic crackle that was not followed up. Filing along the communication trenches, they listened anxiously; artillery fire would have made it bad for the other men who were marching to the rear. But nothing happened. They had a quiet night, and this morning, here they were!

The sky flamed up saffron and silver. Claude looked at his watch, but he could not bear to go just yet. How long it took a Wheeler to get round to anything! Four years on the way; now that he was here, he would enjoy the scenery a bit, he guessed. He wished his mother could know how he felt this morning. But perhaps she did know. At any rate, she would not have him anywhere else. Five years ago, when he was sitting on the steps of the Denver State House and knew that nothing unexpected could ever happen to him . . . suppose he could have seen, in a flash, where he would be today? He cast a long look at the reddening, lengthening landscape, and dropped down on the duckboard.

Claude made his way back to the dugout into which he and Gerhardt had thrown their effects last night. The former

occupants had left it clean. There were two bunks nailed against the side walls,— wooden frames with wire netting over them, covered with dry sandbags. Between the two bunks was a soap-box table, with a candle stuck in a green bottle, an alcohol stove, a *bain-marie,* and two tin cups. On the wall were coloured pictures from *Jugend,* taken out of some Hun trench.

He found Gerhardt still asleep on his bed, and shook him until he sat up.

"How long have you been out, Claude? Didn't you sleep?"

"A little. I wasn't very tired. I suppose we could heat shaving water on this stove; they've left us half a bottle of alcohol. It's quite a comfortable little hole, isn't it?"

"It will doubtless serve its purpose," David remarked dryly. "So sensitive to any criticism of this war! Why, it's not your affair; you've only just arrived."

"I know," Claude replied meekly, as he began to fold his blankets. "But it's likely the only one I'll ever be in, so I may as well take an interest."

. . . . . .

The next afternoon four young men, all more or less naked, were busy about a shellhole full of opaque brown water. Sergeant Hicks and his chum, Dell Able, had hunted through half the blazing hot morning to find a hole not too scummy, conveniently, and even picturesquely situated, and had reported it to the Lieutenants. Captain Maxey, Hicks said, could send his own orderly to find his own shellhole, and could take his bath in private. "He'd never wash himself with anybody else," the Sergeant added. "Afraid of exposing his dignity!"

Bruger and Hammond, the two second Lieutenants, were already out of their bath, and reclined on what might almost

be termed a grassy slope, examining various portions of their body with interest. They hadn't had all their clothes off for some time, and four days of marching in hot weather made a man anxious to look at himself.

"You wait till winter," Gerhardt told them. He was still splashing in the hole, up to his armpits in muddy water. "You won't get a wash once in three months then. Some of the Tommies told me that when they got their first bath after Vimy, their skins peeled off like a snake's. What are you doing with my trousers, Bruger?"

"Hunting for your knife. I dropped mine yesterday, when that shell exploded in the cut-off. I darned near dropped my old nut!"

"Shucks, that wasn't anything. Don't keep blowing about it — shows you're a greenhorn."

Claude stripped off his shirt and slid into the pool beside Gerhardt. "Gee, I hit something sharp down there! Why didn't you fellows pull out the splinters?"

He shut his eyes, disappeared for a moment, and came up sputtering, throwing on the ground a round metal object, coated with rust and full of slime. "German helmet, isn't it? Phew!" He wiped his face and looked about suspiciously.

"Phew is right!" Bruger turned the object over with a stick. "Why in hell didn't you bring up the rest of him? You've spoiled my bath. I hope you enjoy it."

Gerhardt scrambled up the side. "Get out, Wheeler! Look at that," he pointed to big sleepy bubbles, bursting up through the thick water. "You've stirred up trouble, all right! Something's going very bad down there."

Claude got out after him, looking back at the activity in the water. "I don't see how pulling out one helmet could stir the

bottom up so. I should think the water would keep the smell down."

"Ever study chemistry?" Bruger asked scornfully. "You just opened up a graveyard, and now we get the exhaust. If you swallowed any of that German cologne — Oh, you should worry!"

Lieutenant Hammond, still barelegged, with his shirt tied over his shoulders, was scratching in his notebook. Before they left he put up a placard on a split stick.

No Public Bathing! ! Private Beach
C. Wheeler, Co. B. 2-th Inf'ty.

. . . . . .

The first letters from home! The supply wagons brought them up, and every man in the Company got something except Ed Drier, a farm-hand from the Nebraska sand hills, and Willy Katz, the tow-headed Austrian boy from the South Omaha packing-houses. Their comrades were sorry for them. Ed didn't have any "folks" of his own, but he had expected letters all the same. Willy was sure his mother must have written. When the last ragged envelope was given out and he turned away empty-handed, he murmured, "She's Bohunk, and she don't write so good. I guess the address wasn't plain, and some fellow in another comp'ny has got my letter."

No second class matter was sent up,— the boys had hoped for newspapers from home to give them a little war news, since they never got any here. Dell Able's sister, however, had enclosed a clipping from the Kansas City *Star;* a long account by one of the British war correspondents in Mesopotamia, describing the hardships the soldiers suffered there; dysentery, flies, mosquitoes, unimaginable heat. He read this article aloud

to a group of his friends as they sat about a shell-hole pool where they had been washing their socks. He had just finished the story of how the Tommies had found a few mud huts at the place where the original Garden of Eden was said to have been, — a desolate spot full of stinging insects — when Oscar Petersen, a very religious Swedish boy who was often silent for days together, opened his mouth and said scornfully,

"That's a lie!"

Dell looked up at him, annoyed by the interruption. "How do you know it is?"

"Because; the Lord put four cherubims with swords to guard the Garden, and there ain't no man going to find it. It ain't intended they should. The Bible says so."

Hicks began to laugh. "Why, that was about six thousand years ago, you cheese! Do you suppose your cherubims are still there?"

" 'Course they are. What's a thousand years to a cherubim? Nothin'!"

The Swede rose and sullenly gathered up his socks.

Dell Able looked at his chum. "Ain't he the complete bonehead? Solid ivory!"

Oscar wouldn't listen further to a "pack of lies" and walked off with his washing.

. . . . . .

Battalion Headquarters was nearly half a mile behind the front line, part dugout, part shed, with a plank roof sodded over. The Colonel's office was partitioned off at one end; the rest of the place he gave over to the officers for a kind of club room. One night Claude went back to make a report on the new placing of the gun teams. The young officers were sitting

about on soap boxes, smoking and eating sweet crackers out of tin cases. Gerhardt was working at a plank table with paper and crayons, making a clean copy of a rough map they had drawn up together that morning, showing the limits of fire. Noise didn't fluster him; he could sit among a lot of men and write as calmly as if he were alone.

There was one officer who could talk all the others down, wherever he was; Captain Barclay Owens, attached from the Engineers. He was a little stumpy thumb of a man, only five feet four, and very broad,—a dynamo of energy. Before the war he was building a dam in Spain, "the largest dam in the world," and in his excavations he had discovered the ruins of one of Julius Caesar's fortified camps. This had been too much for his easily-inflamed imagination. He photographed and measured and brooded upon these ancient remains. He was an engineer by day and an archaeologist by night. He had crates of books sent down from Paris,—everything that had been written on Caesar, in French and German; he engaged a young priest to translate them aloud to him in the evening. The priest believed the American was mad.

When Owens was in college he had never shown the least interest in classical studies, but now it was as if he were giving birth to Caesar. The war came along, and stopped the work on his dam. It also drove other ideas into his exclusively engineering brains. He rushed home to Kansas to explain the war to his countrymen. He travelled about the West, demonstrating exactly what had happened at the first battle of the Marne, until he had a chance to enlist.

In the Battalion, Owens was called "Julius Caesar," and the men never knew whether he was explaining the Roman general's operations in Spain, or Joffre's at the Marne, he jumped so from

one to the other. Everything was in the foreground with him; centuries made no difference. Nothing existed until Barclay Owens found out about it. The men liked to hear him talk. Tonight he was walking up and down, his yellow eyes rolling, a big black cigar in his hand, lecturing the young officers upon French characteristics, coaching and preparing them. It was his legs that made him so funny; his trunk was that of a big man, set on two short stumps.

"Now you fellows don't want to forget that the night-life of Paris is not a typical thing at all; that's a show got up for foreigners. . . . The French peasant, he's a thrifty fellow. . . . This red wine's all right if you don't abuse it; take it two-thirds water and it keeps off dysentery. . . . You don't have to be rough with them, simply firm. Whenever one of them accosts me, I follow a regular plan; first, I give her twenty-five francs; then I look her in the eye and say, 'My girl, I've got three children, *three boys.*' She gets the point at once; never fails. She goes away ashamed of herself."

"But that's so expensive! It must keep you poor, Captain Owens," said young Lieutenant Hammond innocently. The others roared.

Claude knew that David particularly detested Captain Owens of the Engineers, and wondered that he could go on working with such concentration, when snatches of the Captain's lecture kept breaking through the confusion of casual talk and the noise of the phonograph. Owens, as he walked up and down, cast furtive glances at Gerhardt. He had got wind of the fact that there was something out of the ordinary about him.

The men kept the phonograph going; as soon as one record buzzed out, somebody put in another. Once, when a new tune began, Claude saw David look up from his paper with a curious

expression. He listened for a moment with a half-contemptuous smile, then frowned and began sketching in his map again. Something about his momentary glance of recognition made Claude wonder whether he had particular associations with the air,— melancholy, but beautiful, Claude thought. He got up and went over to change the record himself this time. He took out the disk, and holding it up to the light, read the inscription: "Meditation from Thaïs — Violin solo — David Gerhardt."

When they were going back along the communication trench in the rain, wading single file, Claude broke the silence abruptly. "That was one of your records they played tonight, that violin solo, wasn't it?"

"Sounded like it. Now we go to the right. I always get lost here."

"Are there many of your records?"

"Quite a number. Why do you ask?"

"I'd like to write my mother. She's fond of good music. She'll get your records, and it will sort of bring the whole thing closer to her, don't you see?"

"All right, Claude," said David good-naturedly. "She will find them in the catalogue, with my picture in uniform alongside. I had a lot made before I went out to Camp Dix. My own mother gets a little income from them. Here we are, at home." As he struck a match two black shadows jumped from the table and disappeared behind the blankets. "Plenty of them around these wet nights. Get one? Don't squash him in there. Here's the sack."

Gerhardt held open the mouth of a gunny sack, and Claude thrust the squirming corner of his blanket into it and vigorously trampled whatever fell to the bottom. "Where do you suppose the other is?"

"He'll join us later. I don't mind the rats half so much as I do Barclay Owens. What a sight he would be with his clothes off! Turn in; I'll go the rounds." Gerhardt splashed out along the submerged duckboard. Claude took off his shoes and cooled his feet in the muddy water. He wished he could ever get David to talk about his profession, and wondered what he looked like on a concert platform, playing his violin.

IX

THE following night, Claude was sent back to Division Head-quarters at Q—— with information the Colonel did not care to commit to paper. He set off at ten o'clock, with Sergeant Hicks for escort. There had been two days of rain, and the communication trenches were almost knee-deep in water. About half a mile back of the front line, the two men crawled out of the ditch and went on above ground. There was very little shelling along the front that night. When a flare went up, they dropped and lay on their faces, trying, at the same time, to get a squint at what was ahead of them.

The ground was rough, and the darkness thick; it was past midnight when they reached the east-and-west road — usually full of traffic, and not entirely deserted even on a night like this. Trains of horses were splashing through the mud, with shells on their backs, empty supply wagons were coming back from the front. Claude and Hicks paused by the ditch, hoping to get a ride. The rain began to fall with such violence that they looked about for shelter. Stumbling this way and that, they ran into a big artillery piece, the wheels sunk over the hubs in a mud-hole.

"Who's there?" called a quick voice, unmistakably British.

"American infantrymen, two of us. Can we get onto one of your trucks till this lets up?"

"Oh, certainly! We can make room for you in here, if you're not too big. Speak quietly, or you'll waken the Major."

Giggles and smothered laughter; a flashlight winked for a moment and showed a line of five trucks, the front and rear ones covered with tarpaulin tents. The voices came from the shelter next the gun. The men inside drew up their legs and made room for the strangers; said they were sorry they hadn't anything dry to offer them except a little rum. The intruders accepted this gratefully.

The Britishers were a giggly lot, and Claude thought, from their voices, they must all be very young. They joked about their Major as if he were their schoolmaster. There wasn't room enough on the truck for anybody to lie down, so they sat with their knees under their chins and exchanged gossip. The gun team belonged to an independent battery that was sent about over the country, "wherever needed." The rest of the battery had got through, gone on to the east, but this big gun was always getting into trouble; now something had gone wrong with her tractor and they couldn't pull her out. They called her "Jenny," and said she was taken with fainting fits now and then, and had to be humoured. It was like going about with your grandmother, one of the invisible Tommies said, "she is such a pompous old thing!" The Major was asleep on the rear truck; he was going to get the V. C. for sleeping. More giggles.

No, they hadn't any idea where they were going; of course, the officers knew, but artillery officers never told anything. What was this country like, anyhow? They were new to this part, had just come down from Verdun.

Claude said he had a friend in the air service up there; did they happen to know anything about Victor Morse?

Morse, the American ace? Hadn't he heard? Why, that got into the London papers. Morse was shot down inside the

Hun line three weeks ago. It was a brilliant affair. He was chased by eight Boche planes, brought down three of them, put the rest to flight, and was making for base, when they turned and got him. His machine came down in flames and he jumped, fell a thousand feet or more.

"Then I suppose he never got his leave?" Claude asked.

They didn't know. He got a fine citation.

The men settled down to wait for the weather to improve or the night to pass. Some of them fell into a doze, but Claude felt wide awake. He was wondering about the flat in Chelsea; whether the heavy-eyed beauty had been very sorry, or whether she was playing "Roses of Picardy" for other young officers. He thought mournfully that he would never go to London now. He had quite counted on meeting Victor there some day, after the Kaiser had been properly disposed of. He had really liked Victor. There was something about that fellow . . . a sort of debauched baby, he was, who went seeking his enemy in the clouds. What other age could have produced such a figure? That was one of the things about this war; it took a little fellow from a little town, gave him an air and a swagger, a life like a movie-film,—and then a death like the rebel angels.

A man like Gerhardt, for instance, had always lived in a more or less rose-coloured world; he belonged over here, really. How could he know what hard moulds and crusts the big guns had broken open on the other side of the sea? Who could ever make him understand how far it was from the strawberry bed and the glass cage in the bank, to the sky-roads over Verdun?

By three o'clock the rain had stopped. Claude and Hicks set off again, accompanied by one of the gun team who was going back to get help for their tractor. As it began to grow

light, the two Americans wondered more and more at the extremely youthful appearance of their companion. When they stopped at a shellhole and washed the mud from their faces, the English boy, with his helmet off and the weather stains removed, showed a countenance of adolescent freshness, almost girlish; cheeks like pink apples, yellow curls above his forehead, long, soft lashes.

"You haven't been over very long, have you?" Claude asked in a fatherly tone, as they took the road again.

"I came out in 'sixteen. I was formerly in the infantry."

The Americans liked to hear him talk; he spoke very quickly, in a high, piping voice.

"How did you come to change?"

"Oh, I belonged to one of the Pal Battalions, and we got cut to pieces. When I came out of hospital, I thought I'd try another branch of the service, seeing my pals were gone."

"Now, just what is a Pal Battalion?" drawled Hicks. He hated all English words he didn't understand, though he didn't mind French ones in the least.

"Fellows who signed up together from school," the lad piped.

Hicks glanced at Claude. They both thought this boy ought to be in school for some time yet, and wondered what he looked like when he first came over.

"And you got cut up, you say?" he asked sympathetically.

"Yes, on the Somme. We had rotten luck. We were sent over to take a trench and couldn't. We didn't even get to the wire. The Hun was so well prepared that time, we couldn't manage it. We went over a thousand, and we came back seventeen."

"A hundred and seventeen?"

"No, seventeen."

Hicks whistled and again exchanged looks with Claude. They could neither of them doubt him. There was something very unpleasant about the idea of a thousand fresh-faced schoolboys being sent out against the guns. "It must have been a fool order," he commented. "Suppose there was some mistake at Headquarters?"

"Oh, no, Headquarters knew what it was about! We'd have taken it, if we'd had any sort of luck. But the Hun happened to be full of fight. His machine guns did for us."

"You were hit yourself?" Claude asked him.

"In the leg. He was popping away at me all the while, but I wriggled back on my tummy. When I came out of the hospital my leg wasn't strong, and there's less marching in the artillery.

"I should think you'd have had about enough."

"Oh, a fellow can't stay out after all his chums have been killed! He'd think about it all the time, you know," the boy replied in his clear treble.

Claude and Hicks got into Headquarters just as the cooks were turning out to build their fires. One of the Corporals took them to the officers' bath,—a shed with big tin tubs,—and carried away their uniforms to dry them in the kitchen. It would be an hour before the officers would be about, he said, and in the meantime he would manage to get clean shirts and socks for them.

"Say, Lieutenant," Hicks brought out as he was rubbing himself down with a real bath towel, "I don't want to hear any more about those Pal Battalions, do you? It gets my goat. So long as we were going to get into this, we might have been a little more previous. I hate to feel small."

"Guess we'll have to take our medicine," Claude said dryly. "There wasn't anywhere to duck, was there? I felt like it. Nice little kid. I don't believe American boys ever seem as young as that."

"Why, if you met him anywhere else, you'd be afraid of using bad words before him, he's so pretty! What's the use of sending an orphan asylum out to be slaughtered? I can't see it," grumbled the fat sergeant. "Well, it's their business. I'm not going to let it spoil my breakfast. Suppose we'll draw ham and eggs, Lieutenant?"

X

AFTER breakfast Claude reported to Headquarters and talked with one of the staff Majors. He was told he would have to wait until tomorrow to see Colonel James, who had been called to Paris for a general conference. He had left in his car at four that morning, in response to a telephone message.

"There's not much to do here, by way of amusement," said the Major. "A movie show tonight, and you can get anything you want at the *estaminet,*— the one on the square, opposite the English tank, is the best. There are a couple of nice Frenchwomen in the Red Cross barrack, up on the hill, in the old convent garden. They try to look out for the civilian population, and we're on good terms with them. We get their supplies through with our own, and the quartermaster has orders to help them when they run short. You might go up and call on them. They speak English perfectly."

Claude asked whether he could walk in on them without any kind of introduction.

"Oh, yes, they're used to us! I'll give you a card to Mlle. Olive, though. She's a particular friend of mine. There you are: *'Mlle. Olive de Courcy, introducing, etc.'* And, you understand," here he glanced up and looked Claude over from head to foot, "she's a perfect lady."

Even with an introduction, Claude felt some hesitancy about presenting himself to these ladies. Perhaps they didn't like Americans; he was always afraid of meeting French people

who didn't. It was the same way with most of the fellows in his battalion, he had found; they were terribly afraid of being disliked. And the moment they felt they were disliked, they hastened to behave as badly as possible, in order to deserve it; then they didn't feel that they had been taken in — the worst feeling a doughboy could possibly have!

Claude thought he would stroll about to look at the town a little. It had been taken by the Germans in the autumn of 1914, after their retreat from the Marne, and they had held it until about a year ago, when it was retaken by the English and the Chasseurs d'Alpins. They had been able to reduce it and to drive the Germans out, only by battering it down with artillery; not one building remained standing.

Ruin was ugly, and it was nothing more, Claude was thinking, as he followed the paths that ran over piles of brick and plaster. There was nothing picturesque about this, as there was in the war pictures one saw at home. A cyclone or a fire might have done just as good a job. The place was simply a great dump-heap; an exaggeration of those which disgrace the outskirts of American towns. It was the same thing over and over; mounds of burned brick and broken stone, heaps of rusty, twisted iron, splintered beams and rafters, stagnant pools, cellar holes full of muddy water. An American soldier had stepped into one of those holes a few nights before, and been drowned.

This had been a rich town of eighteen thousand inhabitants; now the civilian population was about four hundred. There were people there who had hung on all through the years of German occupation; others who, as soon as they heard that the enemy was driven out, came back from wherever they had found shelter. They were living in cellars, or in little wooden barracks

made from old timbers and American goods boxes. As he walked along, Claude read familiar names and addresses, painted on boards built into the sides of these frail shelters: "From Emery Bird, Thayer Co. Kansas City, Mo." "Daniels and Fisher, Denver, Colo." These inscriptions cheered him so much that he began to feel like going up and calling on the French ladies.

The sun had come out hot after three days of rain. The stagnant pools and the weeds that grew in the ditches gave out a rank, heavy smell. Wild flowers grew triumphantly over the piles of rotting wood and rusty iron; cornflowers and Queen Anne's lace and poppies; blue and white and red, as if the French colours came up spontaneously out of the French soil, no matter what the Germans did to it.

Claude paused before a little shanty built against a half-demolished brick wall. A gilt cage hung in the doorway, with a canary, singing beautifully. An old woman was working in the garden patch, picking out bits of brick and plaster the rain had washed up, digging with her fingers around the pale carrot-tops and neat lettuce heads. Claude approached her, touched his helmet, and asked her how one could find the way to the Red Cross.

She wiped her hands on her apron and took him by the elbow. *"Vous savez le tank Anglais? Non? Marie, Marie!"*

(He learned afterward that every one was directed to go this way or that from a disabled British tank that had been left on the site of the old town hall.)

A little girl ran out of the barrack, and her grandmother told her to go at once and take the American to the Red Cross. Marie put her hand in Claude's and led him off along one of the paths that wound among the rubbish. She took

him out of the way to show him a church,— evidently one of the ruins of which they were proudest,— where the blue sky was shining through the white arches. The Virgin stood with empty arms over the central door; a little foot sticking to her robe showed where the infant Jesus had been shot away.

"Le bébé est cassé, mais il a protégé sa mère," Marie explained with satisfaction. As they went on, she told Claude that she had a soldier among the Americans who was her friend. *"Il est bon, il est gai, mon soldat,"* but he sometimes drank too much alcohol, and that was a bad habit. Perhaps now, since his comrade had stepped into a cellar hole Monday night while he was drunk, and had been drowned, her "Sharlie" would be warned and would do better. Marie was evidently a well brought up child. Her father, she said, had been a schoolmaster. At the foot of the convent hill she turned to go home. Claude called her back and awkwardly tried to give her some money, but she thrust her hands behind her and said resolutely, *"Non, merci. Je n'ai besoin de rien,"* and then ran away down the path.

As he climbed toward the top of the hill he noticed that the ground had been cleaned up a bit. The path was clear, the bricks and hewn stones had been piled in neat heaps, the broken hedges had been trimmed and the dead parts cut away. Emerging at last into the garden, he stood still for wonder; even though it was in ruins, it seemed so beautiful after the disorder of the world below.

The gravel walks were clean and shining. A wall of very old boxwoods stood green against a row of dead Lombardy poplars. Along the shattered side of the main building, a pear tree, trained on wires like a vine, still flourished,—full of little red pears. Around the stone well was a shaven grass plot,

and everywhere there were little trees and shrubs, which had been too low for the shells to hit,— or for the fire, which had seared the poplars, to catch. The hill must have been wrapped in flames at one time, and all the tall trees had been burned.

The barrack was built against the walls of the cloister,— three arches of which remained, like a stone wing to the shed of planks. On a ladder stood a one-armed young man, driving nails very skilfully with his single hand. He seemed to be making a frame projection from the sloping roof, to support an awning. He carried his nails in his mouth. When he wanted one, he hung his hammer to the belt of his trousers, took a nail from between his teeth, stuck it into the wood, and then deftly rapped it on the head. Claude watched him for a moment, then went to the foot of the ladder and held out his two hands. *"Laissez-moi,"* he exclaimed.

The one aloft spat his nails out into his palm, looked down, and laughed. He was about Claude's age, with very yellow hair and moustache and blue eyes. A charming looking fellow.

"Willingly," he said. "This is no great affair, but I do it to amuse myself, and it will be pleasant for the ladies." He descended and gave his hammer to the visitor. Claude set to work on the frame, while the other went under the stone arches and brought back a roll of canvas,— part of an old tent, by the look of it.

"Un héritage des Boches," he explained unrolling it upon the grass. "I found it among their filth in the cellar, and had the idea to make a pavilion for the ladies, as our trees are destroyed." He stood up suddenly. "Perhaps you have come to see the ladies?"

"Plus tard."

Very well, the boy said, they would get the pavilion done

for a surprise for Mlle. Olive when she returned. She was down in the town now, visiting the sick people. He bent over his canvas again, measuring and cutting with a pair of garden shears, moving round the green plot on his knees, and all the time singing. Claude wished he could understand the words of his song.

While they were working together, tying the cloth up to the frame, Claude, from his elevation, saw a tall girl coming slowly up the path by which he had ascended. She paused at the top, by the boxwood hedge, as if she were very tired, and stood looking at them. Presently she approached the ladder and said in slow, careful English, "Good morning. Louis has found help, I see."

Claude came down from his perch.

"Are you Mlle. de Courcy? I am Claude Wheeler. I have a note of introduction to you, if I can find it."

She took the card, but did not look at it. "That is not necessary. Your uniform is enough. Why have you come?"

He looked at her in some confusion. "Well, really, I don't know! I am just in from the front to see Colonel James, and he is in Paris, so I must wait over a day. One of the staff suggested my coming up here — I suppose because it is so nice!" he finished ingenuously.

"Then you are a guest from the front, and you will have lunch with Louis and me. Madame Barré is also gone for the day. Will you see our house?" She led him through the low door into a living room, unpainted, uncarpeted, light and airy. There were coloured war posters on the clean board walls, brass shell-cases full of wild flowers and garden flowers, canvas camp-chairs, a shelf of books, a table covered by a white silk shawl embroidered with big butterflies. The sun-

light on the floor, the bunches of fresh flowers, the white window curtains stirring in the breeze, reminded Claude of something, but he could not remember what.

"We have no guest room," said Mlle. de Courcy. "But you will come to mine, and Louis will bring you hot water to wash."

In a wooden chamber at the end of the passage, Claude took off his coat, and set to work to make himself as tidy as possible. Hot water and scented soap were in themselves pleasant things. The dresser was an old goods box, stood on end and covered with white lawn. On it there was a row of ivory toilet things, with combs and brushes, powder and cologne, and a pile of white handkerchiefs fresh from the iron. He felt that he ought not to look about him much, but the odor of cleanness, and the indefinable air of personality, tempted him. In one corner, a curtain on a rod made a clothes-closet; in another was a low iron bed, like a soldier's, with a pale blue coverlid and white pillows. He moved carefully and splashed discreetly. There was nothing he could have damaged or broken, not even a rug on the plank floor, and the pitcher and hand-basin were of iron; yet he felt as if he were imperilling something fragile.

When he came out, the table in the living room was set for three. The stout old dame who was placing the plates paid no attention to him,— seemed, from her expression, to scorn him and all his kind. He withdrew as far as possible out of her path and picked up a book from the table, a volume of Heine's *Reisebilder* in German.

Before lunch Mlle. de Courcy showed him the store room in the rear, where the shelves were stocked with rows of coffee tins, condensed milk, canned vegetables and meat, all with

American trade names he knew so well; names which seemed doubly familiar and "reliable" here, so far from home. She told him the people in the town could not have got through the winter without these things. She had to deal them out sparingly, where the need was greatest, but they made the difference between life and death. Now that it was summer, the people lived by their gardens; but old women still came to beg for a few ounces of coffee, and mothers to get a can of milk for the babies.

Claude's face glowed with pleasure. Yes, his country had a long arm. People forgot that; but here, he felt, was some one who did not forget. When they sat down to lunch he learned that Mlle. de Courcy and Madame Barré had been here almost a year now; they came soon after the town was retaken, when the old inhabitants began to drift back. The people brought with them only what they could carry in their arms.

"They must love their country so much, don't you think, when they endure such poverty to come back to it?" she said. "Even the old ones do not often complain about their dear things—their linen, and their china, and their beds. If they have the ground, and hope, all that they can make again. This war has taught us all how little the made things matter. Only the feeling matters."

Exactly so; hadn't he been trying to say this ever since he was born? Hadn't he always known it, and hadn't it made life both bitter and sweet for him? What a beautiful voice she had, this Mlle. Olive, and how nobly it dealt with the English tongue. He would like to say something, but out of so much . . . what? He remained silent, therefore, sat nervously breaking up the black war bread that lay beside his plate.

He saw her looking at his hand, felt in a flash that she regarded it with favour, and instantly put it on his knee, under the table.

"It is our trees that are worst," she went on sadly. "You have seen our poor trees? It makes one ashamed for this beautiful part of France. Our people are more sorry for them than to lose their cattle and horses."

Mlle. de Courcy looked over-taxed by care and responsibility, Claude thought, as he watched her. She seemed far from strong. Slender, grey-eyed, dark-haired, with white transparent skin and a too ardent colour in her lips and cheeks, — like the flame of a feverish activity within. Her shoulders drooped, as if she were always tired. She must be young, too, though there were threads of grey in her hair,— brushed flat and knotted carelessly at the back of her head.

After the coffee, Mlle. de Courcy went to work at her desk, and Louis took Claude to show him the garden. The clearing and trimming and planting were his own work, and he had done it all with one arm. This autumn he would accomplish much more, for he was stronger now, and he had the *habitude* of working single-handed. He must manage to get the dead trees down; they distressed Mademoiselle Olive. In front of the barrack stood four old locusts; the tops were naked forks, burned coal-black, but the lower branches had put out thick tufts of yellow-green foliage, so vigorous that the life in the trunks must still be sound. This fall, Louis said, he meant to get some strong American boys to help him, and they would saw off the dead limbs and trim the tops flat over the thick boles. How much it must mean to a man to love his country like this, Claude thought; to love its trees and flowers; to nurse it when it was sick, and tend its hurts with one arm.

Among the flowers, which had come back self-sown or from old roots, Claude found a group of tall, straggly plants with reddish stems and tiny white blossoms,— one of the evening primrose family, the *Gaura,* that grew along the clay banks of Lovely Creek, at home. He had never thought it very pretty, but he was pleased to find it here. He had supposed it was one of those nameless prairie flowers that grew on the prairie and nowhere else.

When they went back to the barrack, Mlle. Olive was sitting in one of the canvas chairs Louis had placed under the new pavilion.

"What a fine fellow he is!" Claude exclaimed, looking after him.

"Louis? Yes. He was my brother's orderly. When Emile came home on leave he always brought Louis with him, and Louis became like one of the family. The shell that killed my brother tore off his arm. My mother and I went to visit him in the hospital, and he seemed ashamed to be alive, poor boy, when my brother was dead. He put his hand over his face and began to cry, and said, *'Oh, Madame, il était toujours plus chic que moi!'* "

Although Mlle. Olive spoke English well, Claude saw that she did so only by keeping her mind intently upon it. The stiff sentences she uttered were foreign to her nature; her face and eyes ran ahead of her tongue and made one wait eagerly for what was coming. He sat down in a sagging canvas chair, absently twisting a sprig of *Gaura* he had pulled.

"You have found a flower?" She looked up.

"Yes. It grows at home, on my father's farm."

She dropped the faded shirt she was darning. "Oh, tell

me about your country! I have talked to so many, but it is difficult to understand. Yes, tell me about that!"

Nebraska — What was it? How many days from the sea, what did it look like? As he tried to describe it, she listened with half-closed eyes. "Flat — covered with grain — muddy rivers. I think it must be like Russia. But your father's farm; describe that to me, minutely, and perhaps I can see the rest."

Claude took a stick and drew a square in the sand: there, to begin with, was the house and farmyard; there was the big pasture, with Lovely Creek flowing through it; there were the wheatfields and cornfields, the timber claim; more wheat and corn, more pastures. There it all was, diagrammed on the yellow sand, with shadows gliding over it from the half-charred locust trees. He would not have believed that he could tell a stranger about it in such detail. It was partly due to his listener, no doubt; she gave him unusual sympathy, and the glow of an unusual mind. While she bent over his map, questioning him, a light dew of perspiration gathered on her upper lip, and she breathed faster from her effort to see and understand everything. He told her about his mother and his father and Mahailey; what life was like there in summer and winter and autumn — what it had been like in that fateful summer when the Hun was moving always toward Paris, and on those three days when the French were standing at the Marne; how his mother and father waited for him to bring the news at night, and how the very cornfields seemed to hold their breath.

Mlle. Olive sank back wearily in her chair. Claude looked up and saw tears sparkling in her brilliant eyes. "And I myself," she murmured, "did not know of the Marne until days

afterward, though my father and brother were both there! I was far off in Brittany, and the trains did not run. That is what is wonderful, that you are here, telling me this! We,— we were taught from childhood that some day the Germans would come; we grew up under that threat. But you were so safe, with all your wheat and corn. Nothing could touch you, nothing!"

Claude dropped his eyes. "Yes," he muttered, blushing, "shame could. It pretty nearly did. We are pretty late." He rose from his chair as if he were going to fetch something. . . . But where was he to get it from? He shook his head. "I am afraid," he said mournfully, "there is nothing I can say to make you understand how far away it all seemed, how almost visionary. It didn't only seem miles away, it seemed centuries away."

"But you do come,— so many, and from so far! It is the last miracle of this war. I was in Paris on the fourth day of July, when your Marines, just from Belleau Wood, marched for your national fête, and I said to myself as they came on, *'That is a new man!'* Such heads they had, so fine there, behind the ears. Such discipline and purpose. Our people laughed and called to them and threw them flowers, but they never turned to look . . . eyes straight before. They passed like men of destiny." She threw out her hands with a swift movement and dropped them in her lap. The emotion of that day came back in her face. As Claude looked at her burning cheeks, her burning eyes, he understood that the strain of this war had given her a perception that was almost like a gift of prophecy.

A woman came up the hill carrying a baby. Mlle. de Courcy went to meet her and took her into the house. Claude sat

down again, almost lost to himself in the feeling of being completely understood, of being no longer a stranger. In the far distance the big guns were booming at intervals. Down in the garden Louis was singing. Again he wished he knew the words of Louis' songs. The airs were rather melancholy, but they were sung very cheerfully. There was something open and warm about the boy's voice, as there was about his face—something blond, too. It was distinctly a blond voice, like summer wheat-fields, ripe and waving. Claude sat alone for half an hour or more, tasting a new kind of happiness, a new kind of sadness. Ruin and new birth; the shudder of ugly things in the past, the trembling image of beautiful ones on the horizon; finding and losing; that was life, he saw.

When his hostess came back, he moved her chair for her out of the creeping sunlight. "I didn't know there were any French girls like you," he said simply, as she sat down.

She smiled. "I do not think there are any French girls left. There are children and women. I was twenty-one when the war came, and I had never been anywhere without my mother or my brother or sister. Within a year I went all over France alone; with soldiers, with Senegalese, with anybody. Everything is different with us." She lived at Versailles, she told him, where her father had been an instructor in the Military School. He had died since the beginning of the war. Her grandfather was killed in the war of 1870. Hers was a family of soldiers, but not one of the men would be left to see the day of victory.

She looked so tired that Claude knew he had no right to stay. Long shadows were falling in the garden. It was hard to leave; but an hour more or less wouldn't matter. Two peo-

ple could hardly give each other more if they were together for years, he thought.

"Will you tell me where I can come and see you, if we both get through this war?" he asked as he rose.

He wrote it down in his notebook.

"I shall look for you," she said, giving him her hand.

There was nothing to do but to take his helmet and go. At the edge of the hill, just before he plunged down the path, he stopped and glanced back at the garden lying flattened in the sun; the three stone arches, the dahlias and marigolds, the glistening boxwood wall. He had left something on the hilltop which he would never find again.

The next afternoon Claude and his sergeant set off for the front. They had been told at Headquarters that they could shorten their route by following the big road to the military cemetery, and then turning to the left. It was not advisable to go the latter half of the way before nightfall, so they took their time through the belt of straggling crops and hayfields.

When they struck the road they came upon a big Highlander sitting in the end of an empty supply wagon, smoking a pipe and rubbing the dried mud out of his kilts. The horses were munching in their nose-bags, and the driver had disappeared. The Americans hadn't happened to meet with any Highlanders before, and were curious. This one must be a good fighter, they thought; a brawny giant with a bulldog jaw, and a face as red and knobby as his knees. More because he admired the looks of the man than because he needed information, Hicks went up and asked him if he had noticed a military cemetery on the road back. The Kiltie nodded.

"About how far back would you say it was?"

"I wouldn't say at all. I take no account of their kilometers," he replied drily, rubbing away at his skirt as if he had it in a washtub.

"Well, about how long will it take us to walk it?"

"That I couldn't say. A Scotsman would do it in an hour."

"I guess a Yankee can do it as quick as a Scotchman, can't he?" Hicks asked jovially.

"That I couldn't say. You've been four years gettin' this far, I know verra well."

Hicks blinked as if he had been hit. "Oh, if that's the way you talk—"

"That's the way I do," said the other sourly.

Claude put out a warning hand. "Come on, Hicks. You'll get nothing by it." They went up the road very much disconcerted. Hicks kept thinking of things he might have said. When he was angry, the Sergeant's forehead puffed up and became dark red, like a young baby's. "What did you call me off for?" he sputtered.

"I don't see where you'd have come out in an argument, and you certainly couldn't have licked him."

They turned aside at the cemetery to wait until the sun went down. It was unfenced, unsodded, and a wagon trail ran through the middle, bisecting the square. On one side were the French graves, with white crosses; on the other side the German graves, with black crosses. Poppies and cornflowers ran over them. The Americans strolled about, reading the names. Here and there the soldier's photograph was nailed upon his cross, left by some comrade to perpetuate his memory a little longer.

The birds, that always came to life at dusk and dawn, began to sing, flying home from somewhere. Claude and Hicks sat

down between the mounds and began to smoke while the sun dropped. Lines of dead trees marked the red west. This was a dreary stretch of country, even to boys brought up on the flat prairie. They smoked in silence, meditating and waiting for night. On a cross at their feet the inscription read merely:

Soldat Inconnu, Mort pour La France.

A very good epitaph, Claude was thinking. Most of the boys who fell in this war were unknown, even to themselves. They were too young. They died and took their secret with them,— what they were and what they might have been. The name that stood was *La France*. How much that name had come to mean to him, since he first saw a shoulder of land bulk up in the dawn from the deck of the *Anchises*. It was a pleasant name to say over in one's mind, where one could make it as passionately nasal as one pleased and never blush.

Hicks, too, had been lost in his reflections. Now he broke the silence. "Somehow, Lieutenant, *'mort'* seems deader than 'dead.' It has a coffinish sound. And over there they're all *'tod,'* and it's all the same damned silly thing. Look at them set out here, black and white, like a checkerboard. The next question is, who put 'em here, and what's the good of it?"

"Search me," the other murmured absently.

Hicks rolled another cigarette and sat smoking it, his plump face wrinkled with the gravity and labour of his cerebration. "Well," he brought out at last, "we'd better hike. This afterglow will hang on for an hour,— always does, over here."

"I suppose we had." They rose to go. The white crosses were now violet, and the black ones had altogether melted in the shadow. Behind the dead trees in the west, a long smear of red still burned. To the north, the guns were tuning up with

a deep thunder. "Somebody's getting peppered up there. Do owls always hoot in graveyards?"

"Just what I was wondering, Lieutenant. It's a peaceful spot, otherwise. Good-night, boys," said Hicks kindly, as they left the graves behind them.

They were soon finding their way among shellholes, and jumping trench-tops in the dark,— beginning to feel cheerful at getting back to their chums and their own little group. Hicks broke out and told Claude how he and Dell Able meant to go into business together when they got home; were going to open a garage and automobile-repair shop. Under their talk, in the minds of both, that lonely spot lingered, and the legend: *Soldat Inconnu, Mort pour La France.*

XI

AFTER four days' rest in the rear, the Battalion went to the front again in new country, about ten kilometers east of the trench they had relieved before. One morning Colonel Scott sent for Claude and Gerhardt and spread his maps out on the table.

"We are going to clean them out there in F 6 tonight, and straighten our line. The thing that bothers us is that little village stuck up on the hill, where the enemy machine guns have a strong position. I want to get them out of there before the Battalion goes over. We can't spare too many men, and I don't like to send out more officers than I can help; it won't do to reduce the Battalion for the major operation. Do you think you two boys could manage it with a hundred men? The point is, you will have to be out and back before our artillery begins at three o'clock."

Under the hill where the village stood, ran a deep ravine, and from this ravine a twisting water course wound up the hillside. By climbing this gully, the raiders should be able to fall on the machine gunners from the rear and surprise them. But first they must get across the open stretch, nearly one and a half kilometers wide, between the American line and the ravine, without attracting attention. It was raining now, and they could safely count on a dark night.

The night came on black enough. The Company crossed the open stretch without provoking fire, and slipped into the ravine to wait for the hour of attack. A young doctor, a Penn-

sylvanian, lately attached to the staff, had volunteered to come with them, and he arranged a dressing station at the bottom of the ravine, where the stretchers were left. They were to pick up their wounded on the way back. Anything left in that area would be exposed to the artillery fire later on.

At ten o'clock the men began to ascend the water-course, creeping through pools and little waterfalls, making a continuous spludgy sound, like pigs rubbing against the sty. Claude, with the head of the column, was just pulling out of the gully on the hillside above the village, when a flare went up, and a volley of fire broke from the brush on the up-hill side of the water-course; machine guns, opening on the exposed line crawling below. The Hun had been warned that the Americans were crossing the plain and had anticipated their way of approach. The men in the gully were trapped; they could not retaliate with effect, and the bullets from the Maxims bounded on the rocks about them like hail. Gerhardt ran along the edge of the line, urging the men not to fall back and double on themselves, but to break out of the gully on the down-hill side and scatter.

Claude, with his group, started back. "Go into the brush and get 'em! Our fellows have got no chance down there. Grenades while they last, then bayonets. Pull your plugs and don't hold on too long."

They were already on the run, charging the brush. The Hun gunners knew the hill like a book, and when the bombs began bursting among them, they took to trails and burrows. "Don't follow them off into the rocks," Claude kept calling. "Straight ahead! Clear everything to the ravine."

As the German gunners made for cover, the firing into the

gully stopped, and the arrested column poured up the steep defile after Gerhardt.

Claude and his party found themselves back at the foot of the hill, at the edge of the ravine from which they had started. Heavy firing on the hill above told them the rest of the men had got through. The quickest way back to the scene of action was by the same water-course they had climbed before. They dropped into it and started up. Claude, at the rear, felt the ground rise under him, and he was swept with a mountain of earth and rock down into the ravine.

He never knew whether he lost consciousness or not. It seemed to him that he went on having continuous sensations. The first, was that of being blown to pieces; of swelling to an enormous size under intolerable pressure, and then bursting. Next he felt himself shrink and tingle, like a frost-bitten body thawing out. Then he swelled again, and burst. This was repeated, he didn't know how often. He soon realized that he was lying under a great weight of earth;—his body, not his head. He felt rain falling on his face. His left hand was free, and still attached to his arm. He moved it cautiously to his face. He seemed to be bleeding from the nose and ears. Now he began to wonder where he was hurt; he felt as if he were full of shell splinters. Everything was buried but his head and left shoulder. A voice was calling from somewhere below.

"Are any of you fellows alive?"

Claude closed his eyes against the rain beating in his face. The same voice came again, with a note of patient despair.

"If there's anybody left alive in this hole, won't he speak up? I'm badly hurt myself."

That must be the new doctor; wasn't his dressing station

somewhere down here? Hurt, he said. Claude tried to move his legs a little. Perhaps, if he could get out from under the dirt, he might hold together long enough to reach the doctor. He began to wriggle and pull. The wet earth sucked at him; it was painful business. He braced himself with his elbows, but kept slipping back.

"I'm the only one left, then?" said the mournful voice below.

At last Claude worked himself out of his burrow, but he was unable to stand. Every time he tried to stand, he got faint and seemed to burst again. Something was the matter with his right ankle, too — he couldn't bear his weight on it. Perhaps he had been too near the shell to be hit; he had heard the boys tell of such cases. It had exploded under his feet and swept him down into the ravine, but hadn't left any metal in his body. If it had put anything into him, it would have put so much that he wouldn't be sitting here speculating. He began to crawl down the slope on all fours. "Is that the Doctor? Where are you?"

"Here, on a stretcher. They shelled us. Who are you? Our fellows got up, didn't they?"

"I guess most of them did. What happened back here?"

"I'm afraid it's my fault," the voice said sadly. "I used my flash light, and that must have given them the range. They put three or four shells right on top of us. The fellows that got hurt in the gully kept stringing back here, and I couldn't do anything in the dark. I had to have a light to do anything. I just finished putting on a Johnson splint when the first shell came. I guess they're all done for now."

"How many were there?"

"Fourteen, I think. Some of them weren't much hurt. They'd all be alive, if I hadn't come out with you."

"Who were they? But you don't know our names yet, do you? You didn't see Lieutenant Gerhardt among them?"

"Don't think so."

"Nor Sergeant Hicks, the fat fellow?"

"Don't think so."

"Where are you hurt?"

"Abdominal. I can't tell anything without a light. I lost my flash light. It never occurred to me that it could make trouble; it's one I use at home, when the babies are sick," the doctor murmured.

Claude tried to strike a match, with no success. "Wait a minute, where's your helmet?" He took off his metal hat, held it over the doctor, and managed to strike a light underneath it. The wounded man had already loosened his trousers, and now he pulled up his bloody shirt. His groin and abdomen were torn on the left side. The wound, and the stretcher on which he lay, supported a mass of dark, coagulated blood that looked like a great cow's liver.

"I guess I've got mine," the Doctor murmured as the match went out.

Claude struck another. "Oh, that can't be! Our fellows will be back pretty soon, and we can do something for you."

"No use, Lieutenant. Do you suppose you could strip a coat off one of those poor fellows? I feel the cold terribly in my intestines. I had a bottle of French brandy, but I suppose it's buried."

Claude stripped off his own coat, which was warm on the inside, and began feeling about in the mud for the brandy. He wondered why the poor man wasn't screaming with pain. The firing on the hill had ceased, except for the occasional

click of a Maxim, off in the rocks somewhere. His watch said 12:10; could anything have miscarried up there?

Suddenly, voices above, a clatter of boots on the shale. He began shouting to them.

"Coming, coming!" He knew the voice. Gerhardt and his rifles ran down into the ravine with a bunch of prisoners. Claude called to them to be careful. "Don't strike a light! They've been shelling down here."

"All right are you, Wheeler? Where are the wounded?"

"There aren't any but the Doctor and me. Get us out of here quick. I'm all right, but I can't walk."

They put Claude on a stretcher and sent him ahead. Four big Germans carried him, and they were prodded to a lope by Hicks and Dell Able. Four of their own men took up the doctor, and Gerhardt walked beside him. In spite of their care, the motion started the blood again and tore away the clots that had formed over his wounds. He began to vomit blood and to strangle. The men put the stretcher down. Gerhardt lifted the Doctor's head. "It's over," he said presently. "Better make the best time you can."

They picked up their load again. "Them that are carrying him now won't jolt him," said Oscar, the pious Swede.

B Company lost nineteen men in the raid. Two days later the Company went off on a ten-day leave. Claude's sprained ankle was twice its natural size, but to avoid being sent to the hospital he had to march to the railhead. Sergeant Hicks got him a giant shoe he found stuck on the barbed wire entanglement. Claude and Gerhardt were going off on their leave together.

XII

A RAINY autumn night; Papa Joubert sat reading his paper. He heard a heavy pounding on his garden gate. Kicking off his slippers, he put on the wooden sabots he kept for mud, shuffled across the dripping garden, and opened the door into the dark street. Two tall figures with rifles and kits confronted him. In a moment he began embracing them, calling to his wife:

"Nom de diable, Maman, c'est David, David et Claude, tous les deux!"

Sorry-looking soldiers they appeared when they stood in the candle-light,— plastered with clay, their metal hats shining like copper bowls, their clothes dripping pools of water upon the flags of the kitchen floor. Mme. Joubert kissed their wet cheeks, and Monsieur, now that he could see them, embraced them again. Whence had they come, and how had it fared with them, up there? Very well, as anybody could see. What did they want first,— supper, perhaps? Their room was always ready for them; and the clothes they had left were in the big chest.

David explained that their shirts had not once been dry for four days; and what they most desired was to be dry and to be clean. Old Martha, already in bed, was routed out to heat water. M. Joubert carried the big washtub upstairs. Tomorrow for conversation, he said; tonight for repose. The boys followed him and began to peel off their wet uniforms,

leaving them in two sodden piles on the floor. There was one bath for both, and they threw up a coin to decide which should get into the warm water first. M. Joubert, seeing Claude's fat ankle strapped up in adhesive bandages, began to chuckle. "Oh, I see the Boche made you dance up there!"

When they were clad in clean pyjamas out of the chest, Papa Joubert carried their shirts and socks down for Martha to wash. He returned with the big meat platter, on which was an omelette made of twelve eggs and stuffed with bacon and fried potatoes. Mme. Joubert brought the three-story earthen coffee-pot to the door and called, *"Bon appetit!"* The host poured the coffee and cut up the loaf with his clasp knife. He sat down to watch them eat. How had they found things up there, anyway? The Boches polite and agreeable as usual? Finally, when there was not a crumb of anything left, he poured for each a little glass of brandy, *"pour aider la digestion,"* and wished them good-night. He took the candle with him.

Perfect bliss, Claude reflected, as the chill of the sheets grew warm around his body, and he sniffed in the pillow the old smell of lavender. To be so warm, so dry, so clean, so beloved! The journey down, reviewed from here, seemed beautiful. As soon as they had got out of the region of martyred trees, they found the land of France turning gold. All along the river valleys the poplars and cottonwoods had changed from green to yellow,—evenly coloured, looking like candle-flames in the mist and rain. Across the fields, along the horizon they ran, like torches passed from hand to hand, and all the willows by the little streams had become silver. The vineyards were green still, thickly spotted with curly, blood-red branches. It all flashed back beside his pillow in the dark:

this beautiful land, this beautiful people, this beautiful omelette; gold poplars, blue-green vineyards, wet, scarlet vine-leaves, rain dripping into the court, fragrant darkness . . . sleep, stronger than all.

XIII

THE woodland path was deep in leaves. Claude and David were lying on the dry, springy heather among the flint boulders. Gerhardt, with his Stetson over his eyes, was presumably asleep. They were having fine weather for their holiday. The forest rose about this open glade like an amphitheatre, in golden terraces of horsechestnut and beech. The big nuts dropped velvety and brown, as if they had been soaked in oil, and disappeared in the dry leaves below. Little black yew trees, that had not been visible in the green of summer, stood out among the curly yellow brakes. Through the grey netting of the beech twigs, stiff holly bushes glittered.

It was the Wheeler way to dread false happiness, to feel cowardly about being fooled. Since he had come back, Claude had more than once wondered whether he took too much for granted and felt more at home here than he had any right to feel. The Americans were prone, he had observed, to make themselves very much at home, to mistake good manners for good-will. He had no right to doubt the affection of the Jouberts, however; that was genuine and personal,—not a smooth surface under which almost any shade of scorn might lie and laugh . . . was not, in short, the treacherous "French politeness" by which one must not let oneself be taken in. Merely having seen the season change in a country gave one the sense of having been there for a long time. And, anyway, he wasn't a tourist. He was here on legitimate business.

Claude's sprained ankle was still badly swollen. Madame

Joubert was sure he ought not to move about on it at all, begged him to sit in the garden all day and nurse it. But the surgeon at the front had told him that if he once stopped walking, he would have to go to the hospital. So, with the help of his host's best holly-wood cane, he limped out into the forest every day. This afternoon he was tempted to go still farther. Madame Joubert had told him about some caves at the other end of the wood, underground chambers where the country people had gone to live in times of great misery, long ago, in the English wars. The English wars; he could not remember just how far back they were,— but long enough to make one feel comfortable. As for him, perhaps he would never go home at all. Perhaps, when this great affair was over, he would buy a little farm and stay here for the rest of his life. That was a project he liked to play with. There was no chance for the kind of life he wanted at home, where people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down. He had begun to believe that the Americans were a people of shallow emotions. That was the way Gerhardt had put it once; and if it was true, there was no cure for it. Life was so short that it meant nothing at all unless it were continually reinforced by something that endured; unless the shadows of individual existence came and went against a background that held together. While he was absorbed in his day dream of farming in France, his companion stirred and rolled over on his elbow.

"You know we are to join the Battalion at A——. They'll be living like kings there. Hicks will get so fat he'll drop over on the march. Headquarters must have something particularly nasty in mind; the infantry is always fed up before a slaughter. But I've been thinking; I have some old friends at A——. Suppose we go on there a day early, and get them to take us in?

It's a fine old place, and I ought to go to see them. The son was a fellow student of mine at the Conservatoire. He was killed the second winter of the war. I used to go up there for the holidays with him; I would like to see his mother and sister again. You've no objection?"

Claude did not answer at once. He lay squinting off at the beech trees, without moving. "You always avoid that subject with me, don't you?" he said presently.

"What subject?"

"Oh, anything to do with the Conservatoire, or your profession."

"I haven't any profession at present. I'll never go back to the violin."

"You mean you couldn't make up for the time you'll lose?"

Gerhardt settled his back against a rock and got out his pipe. "That would be difficult; but other things would be harder. I've lost much more than time."

"Couldn't you have got exemption, one way or another?"

"I might have. My friends wanted to take it up and make a test case of me. But I couldn't stand for it. I didn't feel I was a good enough violinist to admit that I wasn't a man. I often wish I had been in Paris that summer when the war broke out; then I would have gone into the French army on the first impulse, with the other students, and it would have been better."

David paused and sat puffing at his pipe. Just then a soft movement stirred the brakes on the hillside. A little barefoot girl stood there, looking about. She had heard voices, but at first did not see the uniforms that blended with the yellow and brown of the wood. Then she saw the sun shining on two heads; one square, and amber in colour,—the other reddish

bronze, long and narrow. She took their friendliness for granted and came down the hill, stopping now and again to pick up shiny horsechestnuts and pop them into a sack she was dragging. David called to her and asked her whether the nuts were good to eat.

"Oh, non!" she exclaimed, her face expressing the liveliest terror, *"pour les cochons!"* These inexperienced Americans might eat almost anything. The boys laughed and gave her some pennies, *"pour les cochons aussi."* She stole about the edge of the wood, stirring among the leaves for nuts, and watching the two soldiers.

Gerhardt knocked out his pipe and began to fill it again. "I went home to see my mother in May, of 1914. I wasn't here when the war broke out. The Conservatoire closed at once, so I arranged a concert tour in the States that winter, and did very well. That was before all the little Russians went over, and the field wasn't so crowded. I had a second season, and that went well. But I was getting more nervous all the time; I was only half there." He smoked thoughtfully, sitting with folded arms, as if he were going over a succession of events or states of feeling. "When my number was drawn, I reported to see what I could do about getting out; I took a look at the other fellows who were trying to squirm, and chucked it. I've never been sorry. Not long afterward, my violin was smashed, and my career seemed to go along with it."

Claude asked him what he meant.

"While I was at Camp Dix, I had to play at one of the entertainments. My violin, a Stradivarius, was in a vault in New York. I didn't need it for that concert, any more than I need it at this minute; yet I went to town and brought it out. I was taking it up from the station in a military car, and a

drunken taxi driver ran into us. I wasn't hurt, but the violin, lying across my knees, was smashed into a thousand pieces. I didn't know what it meant then; but since, I've seen so many beautiful old things smashed . . . I've become a fatalist."

Claude watched his brooding head against the grey flint rock.

"You ought to have kept out of the whole thing. Any army man would say so."

David's head went back against the boulder, and he threw one of the chestnuts lightly into the air. "Oh, one violinist more or less doesn't matter! But who is ever going back to anything? That's what I want to know!"

Claude felt guilty; as if David must have guessed what apostasy had been going on in his own mind this afternoon. "You don't believe we are going to get out of this war what we went in for, do you?" he asked suddenly.

"Absolutely not," the other replied with cool indifference.

"Then I certainly don't see what you're here for!"

"Because in 1917 I was twenty-four years old, and able to bear arms. The war was put up to our generation. I don't know what for; the sins of our fathers, probably. Certainly not to make the world safe for Democracy, or any rhetoric of that sort. When I was doing stretcher work, I had to tell myself over and over that nothing would come of it, but that it had to be. Sometimes, though, I think something must. . . . Nothing we expect, but something unforeseen." He paused and shut his eyes. "You remember in the old mythology tales how, when the sons of the gods were born, the mothers always died in agony? Maybe it's only Semêle I'm thinking of. At any rate, I've sometimes wondered whether the young men of our time had to die to bring a new idea into the world . . . something Olympian. I'd like to know. I think I shall know.

Since I've been over here this time, I've come to believe in immortality. Do you?"

Claude was confused by this quiet question. "I hardly know. I've never been able to make up my mind."

"Oh, don't bother about it! If it comes to you, it comes. You don't have to go after it. I arrived at it in quite the same way I used to get things in art,—knowing them and living on them before I understood them. Such ideas used to seem childish to me." Gerhardt sprang up. "Now, have I told you what you want to know about my case?" He looked down at Claude with a curious glimmer of amusement and affection. "I'm going to stretch my legs. It's four o'clock."

He disappeared among the red pine stems, where the sunlight made a rose-coloured lake, as it used to do in the summer . . . as it would do in all the years to come, when they were not there to see it, Claude was thinking. He pulled his hat over his eyes and went to sleep.

The little girl on the edge of the beechwood left her sack and stole quietly down the hill. Sitting in the heather and drawing her feet up under her, she stayed still for a long time, and regarded with curiosity the relaxed, deep-breathing body of the American soldier.

The next day was Claude's twenty-fifth birthday, and in honour of that event Papa Joubert produced a bottle of old Burgundy from his cellar, one of a few dozens he had laid in for great occasions when he was a young man.

During that week of idleness at Madame Joubert's, Claude often thought that the period of happy "youth," about which his old friend Mrs. Erlich used to talk, and which he had never experienced, was being made up to him now. He was having

his youth in France. He knew that nothing like this would ever come again; the fields and woods would never again be laced over with this hazy enchantment. As he came up the village street in the purple evening, the smell of wood-smoke from the chimneys went to his head like a narcotic, opened the pores of his skin, and sometimes made the tears come to his eyes. Life had after all turned out well for him, and everything had a noble significance. The nervous tension in which he had lived for years now seemed incredible to him . . . absurd and childish, when he thought of it at all. He did not torture himself with recollections. He was beginning over again.

One night he dreamed that he was at home; out in the ploughed fields, where he could see nothing but the furrowed brown earth, stretching from horizon to horizon. Up and down it moved a boy, with a plough and two horses. At first he thought it was his brother Ralph; but on coming nearer, he saw it was himself,—and he was full of fear for this boy. Poor Claude, he would never, never get away; he was going to miss everything! While he was struggling to speak to Claude, and warn him, he awoke.

In the years when he went to school in Lincoln, he was always hunting for some one whom he could admire without reservations; some one he could envy, emulate, wish to be. Now he believed that even then he must have had some faint image of a man like Gerhardt in his mind. It was only in war times that their paths would have been likely to cross; or that they would have had anything to do together . . . any of the common interests that make men friends.

XIV

GERHARDT and Claude Wheeler alighted from a taxi before the open gates of a square-roofed, solid-looking house, where all the shutters on the front were closed, and the tops of many trees showed above the garden wall. They crossed a paved court and rang at the door. An old valet admitted the young men, and took them through a wide hall to the salon, which opened on the garden. Madame and Mademoiselle would be down very soon. David went to one of the long windows and looked out. "They have kept it up, in spite of everything. It was always lovely here."

The garden was spacious,—like a little park. On one side was a tennis court, on the other a fountain, with a pool and water-lilies. The north wall was hidden by ancient yews; on the south two rows of plane trees, cut square, made a long arbour. At the back of the garden there were fine old lindens. The gravel walks wound about beds of gorgeous autumn flowers; in the rose garden, small white roses were still blooming, though the leaves were already red.

Two ladies entered the drawing-room. The mother was short, plump, and rosy, with strong, rather masculine features and yellowish white hair. The tears flashed into her eyes as David bent to kiss her hand, and she embraced him and touched both his cheeks with her lips.

"Et vous, vous aussi!" she murmured, touching the coat of his uniform with her fingers. There was but a moment of softness. She gathered herself up like an old general,

Claude thought, as he stood watching the group from the window, drew her daughter forward, and asked David whether he recognized the little girl with whom he used to play. Mademoiselle Claire was not at all like her mother; slender, dark, dressed in a white *costume de tennis* and an apple green hat with black ribbons, she looked very modern and casual and unconcerned. She was already telling David she was glad he had arrived early, as now they would be able to have a game of tennis before tea. *Maman* would bring her knitting to the garden and watch them. This last suggestion relieved Claude's apprehension that he might be left alone with his hostess. When David called him and presented him to the ladies, Mlle. Claire gave him a quick handshake, and said she would be very glad to try him out on the court as soon as she had beaten David. They would find tennis shoes in their room,—a collection of shoes, for the feet of all nations; her brother's, some that his Russian friend had forgotten when he hurried off to be mobilized, and a pair lately left by an English officer who was quartered on them. She and her mother would wait in the garden. She rang for the old valet.

The Americans found themselves in a large room upstairs, where two modern iron beds stood out conspicuous among heavy mahogany bureaus and desks and dressing-tables, stuffed chairs and velvet carpets and dull red brocade window hangings. David went at once into the little dressing-room and began to array himself for the tennis court. Two suits of flannels and a row of soft shirts hung there on the wall.

"Aren't you going to change?" he asked, noticing that Claude stood stiff and unbending by the window, looking down into the garden.

"Why should I?" said Claude scornfully. "I don't play tennis. I never had a racket in my hand."

"Too bad. She used to play very well, though she was only a youngster then." Gerhardt was regarding his legs in trousers two inches too short for him. "How everything has changed, and yet how everything is still the same! It's like coming back to places in dreams."

"They don't give you much time to dream, I should say!" Claude remarked.

"Fortunately!"

"Explain to the girl that I don't play, will you? I'll be down later."

"As you like."

Claude stood in the window, watching Gerhardt's bare head and Mlle. Claire's green hat and long brown arm go bounding about over the court.

When Gerhardt came to change before tea, he found his fellow officer standing before his bag, which was open, but not unpacked.

"What's the matter? Feeling shellshock again?"

"Not exactly." Claude bit his lip. "The fact is, Dave, I don't feel just comfortable here. Oh, the people are all right But I'm out of place. I'm going to pull out and get a bille somewhere else, and let you visit your friends in peace. Wh should I be here? These people don't keep a hotel."

"They very nearly do, from what they've been telling m They've had a string of Scotch and English quartered on then They like it, too,—or have the good manners to pretend the do. Of course, you'll do as you like, but you'll hurt the feelings and put me in an awkward position. To be frank, don't see how you can go away without being distinctly rude

Claude stood looking down at the contents of his bag in an irresolute attitude. Catching a glimpse of his face in one of the big mirrors, Gerhardt saw that he looked perplexed and miserable. His flash of temper died, and he put his hand lightly on his friend's shoulder.

"Come on, Claude! This is too absurd. You don't even have to dress, thanks to your uniform,—and you don't have to talk, since you're not supposed to know the language. I thought you'd like coming here. These people have had an awfully rough time; can't you admire their pluck?"

"Oh, yes, I do! It's awkward for me, though." Claude pulled off his coat and began to brush his hair vigorously. "I guess I've always been more afraid of the French than of the Germans. It takes courage to stay, you understand. I want to run."

"But why? What makes you want to?"

"Oh, I don't know! Something in the house, in the atmosphere."

"Something disagreeable?"

"No. Something agreeable."

David laughed. "Oh, you'll get over that!"

They had tea in the garden, English fashion — English tea, too, Mlle. Claire informed them, left by the English officers.

At dinner a third member of the family was introduced, a little boy with a cropped head and big black eyes. He sat on Claude's left, quiet and shy in his velvet jacket, though he followed the conversation eagerly, especially when it touched upon his brother René, killed at Verdun in the second winter of the war. The mother and sister talked about him as if he were living, about his letters and his plans, and his friends at the Conservatoire and in the Army.

Mlle. Claire told Gerhardt news of all the girl students he had known in Paris: how this one was singing for the soldiers; another, when she was nursing in a hospital which was bombed in an air raid, had carried twenty wounded men out of the burning building, one after another, on her back, like sacks of flour. Alice, the dancer, had gone into the English Red Cross and learned English. Odette had married a New Zealander, an officer who was said to be a cannibal; it was well known that his tribe had eaten two Auvergnat missionaries. There was a great deal more that Claude could not understand, but he got enough to see that for these women the war was France, the war was life, and everything that went into it. To be alive, to be conscious and have one's faculties, was to be in the war.

After dinner, when they went into the salon, Madame Fleury asked David whether he would like to see René's violin again, and nodded to the little boy. He slipped away and returned carrying the case, which he placed on the table. He opened it carefully and took off the velvet cloth, as if this was his peculiar office, then handed the instrument to Gerhardt.

David turned it over under the candles, telling Madame Fleury that he would have known it anywhere, René's wonderful Amati, almost too exquisite in tone for the concert hall, like a woman who is too beautiful for the stage. The family stood round and listened to his praise with evident satisfaction. Madame Fleury told him that Lucien was *très sérieux* with his music, that his master was well pleased with him, and when his hand was a little larger he would be allowed to play upon René's violin. Claude watched the little boy as he stood looking at the instrument in David's hands; in each of his big black eyes a candle flame was reflected, as if some steady fire were actually burning there.

"What is it, Lucien?" his mother asked.

"If Monsieur David would be so good as to play before I must go to bed—" he murmured entreatingly.

"But, Lucien, I am a soldier now. I have not worked at all for two years. The Amati would think it had fallen into the hands of a Boche."

Lucien smiled. "Oh, no! It is too intelligent for that. A little, please," and he sat down on a footstool before the sofa in confident anticipation.

Mlle. Claire went to the piano. David frowned and began to tune the violin. Madame Fleury called the old servant and told him to light the sticks that lay in the fireplace. She took the arm-chair at the right of the hearth and motioned Claude to a seat on the left. The little boy kept his stool at the other end of the room. Mlle. Claire began the orchestral introduction to the Saint-Saëns concerto.

"Oh, not that!" David lifted his chin and looked at her in perplexity.

She made no reply, but played on, her shoulders bent forward. Lucien drew his knees up under his chin and shivered. When the time came, the violin made its entrance. David had put it back under his chin mechanically, and the instrument broke into that suppressed, bitter melody.

They played for a long while. At last David stopped and wiped his forehead. "I'm afraid I can't do anything with the third movement, really."

"Nor can I. But that was the last thing René played on it, the night before he went away, after his last leave." She began again, and David followed. Madame Fleury sat with half-closed eyes, looking into the fire. Claude, his lips compressed, his hands on his knees, was watching his friend's back. The

music was a part of his own confused emotions. He was torn between generous admiration, and bitter, bitter envy. What would it mean to be able to do anything as well as that, to have a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power? If he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting here tonight a wooden thing amongst living people. He felt that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it; tongue-tied, foot-tied, hand-tied. If one were born into this world like a bear cub or a bull calf, one could only paw and upset things, break and destroy, all one's life.

Gerhardt wrapped the violin up in its cloth. The little boy thanked him and carried it away. Madame Fleury and her daughter wished their guests good-night.

David said he was warm, and suggested going into the garden to smoke before they went to bed. He opened one of the long windows and they stepped out on the terrace. Dry leaves were rustling down on the walks; the yew trees made a solid wall, blacker than the darkness. The fountain must have caught the starlight; it was the only shining thing,—a little clear column of twinkling silver. The boys strolled in silence to the end of the walk.

"I guess you'll go back to your profession, all right," Claude remarked, in the unnatural tone in which people sometimes speak of things they know nothing about.

"Not I. Of course, I had to play for them. Music has always been like a religion in this house. Listen," he put up his hand; far away the regular pulsation of the big guns sounded through the still night. "That's all that matters now. It has killed everything else."

"I don't believe it." Claude stopped for a moment by the

edge of the fountain, trying to collect his thoughts. "I don't believe it has killed anything. It has only scattered things." He glanced about hurriedly at the sleeping house, the sleeping garden, the clear, starry sky not very far overhead. "It's men like you that get the worst of it," he broke out. "But as for me, I never knew there was anything worth living for, till this war came on. Before that, the world seemed like a business proposition."

"You'll admit it's a costly way of providing adventure for the young," said David drily.

"Maybe so; all the same . . ."

Claude pursued the argument to himself long after they were in their luxurious beds and David was asleep. No battlefield or shattered country he had seen was as ugly as this world would be if men like his brother Bayliss controlled it altogether. Until the war broke out, he had supposed they did control it; his boyhood had been clouded and enervated by that belief. The Prussians had believed it, too, apparently. But the event had shown that there were a great many people left who cared about something else.

The intervals of the distant artillery fire grew shorter, as if the big guns were tuning up, choking to get something out. Claude sat up in his bed and listened. The sound of the guns had from the first been pleasant to him, had given him a feeling of confidence and safety; tonight he knew why. What they said was, that men could still die for an idea; and would burn all they had made to keep their dreams. He knew the future of the world was safe; the careful planners would never be able to put it into a strait-jacket,— cunning and prudence would never have it to themselves. Why, that little boy downstairs, with the candlelight in his eyes, when it came to the last

cry, as they said, could "carry on" for ever! Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men. As long as that was true, and now he knew it was true — he had come all this way to find out — he had no quarrel with Destiny. Nor did he envy David. He would give his own adventure for no man's. On the edge of sleep it seemed to glimmer, like the clear column of the fountain, like the new moon,— alluring, half-averted, the bright face of danger.

XV

WHEN Claude and David rejoined their Battalion on the 20th of September, the end of the war looked as far away as ever. The collapse of Bulgaria was unknown to the American army, and their acquaintance with European affairs was so slight that this would have meant very little to them had they heard of it. The German army still held the north and east of France, and no one could say how much vitality was left in that sprawling body.

The Battalion entrained at Arras. Lieutenant Colonel Scott had orders to proceed to the railhead, and then advance on foot into the Argonne.

The cars were crowded, and the railway journey was long and fatiguing. They detrained at night, in the rain, at what the men said seemed to be the jumping-off place. There was no town, and the railway station had been bombed the day before, by an air fleet out to explode artillery ammunition. A mound of brick, and holes full of water told where it had been. The Colonel sent Claude out with a patrol to find some place for the men to sleep. The patrol came upon a field of strawstacks, and at the end of it found a black farmhouse.

Claude went up and hammered on the door. Silence. He kept hammering and calling, "The Americans are here!" A shutter opened. The farmer stuck his head out and demanded gruffly what was wanted; "What now?"

Claude explained in his best French that an American bat-

talion had just come in; might they sleep in his field if they did not destroy his stacks?

"Sure," replied the farmer, and shut the window.

That one word, coming out of the dark in such an unpromising place, had a cheering effect upon the patrol, and upon the men, when it was repeated to them. "Sure, eh?" They kept laughing over it as they beat about the field and dug into the straw. Those who couldn't burrow into a stack lay down in the muddy stubble. They were asleep before they could feel sorry for themselves.

The farmer came out to offer his stable to the officers, and to beg them not on any account to make a light. They had never been bothered here by air raids until yesterday, and it must be because the Americans were coming and were sending in ammunition.

Gerhardt, who was called to talk to him, told the farmer the Colonel must study his map, and for that the man took them down into the cellar, where the children were asleep. Before he lay down on the straw bed his orderly had made for him, the Colonel kept telling names and kilometers off on his fingers. For officers like Colonel Scott the names of places constituted one of the real hardships of the war. His mind worked slowly, but it was always on his job, and he could go without sleep for more hours together than any of his officers. Tonight he had scarcely lain down, when a sentinel brought in a runner with a message. The Colonel had to go into the cellar again to read it. He was to meet Colonel Harvey at Prince Joachim farm, as early as possible tomorrow morning. The runner would act as guide.

The Colonel sat with his eye on his watch, and interrogated the messenger about the road and the time it would take to get

over the ground. "What's Fritz's temper up here, generally speaking?"

"That's as it happens, sir. Sometimes we nab a night patrol of a dozen or fifteen and send them to the rear under a one-man guard. Then, again, a little bunch of Heinies will fight like the devil. They say it depends on what part of Germany they come from; the Bavarians and Saxons are the bravest."

Colonel Scott waited for an hour, and then went about, shaking his sleeping officers.

"Yes, sir." Captain Maxey sprang to his feet as if he had been caught in a disgraceful act. He called his sergeants, and they began to beat the men up out of the strawstacks and puddles. In half an hour they were on the road.

This was the Battalion's first march over really bad roads, where walking was a question of pulling and balancing. They were soon warm, at any rate; it kept them sweating. The weight of their equipment was continually thrown in the wrong place. Their wet clothing dragged them back, their packs got twisted and cut into their shoulders. Claude and Hicks began wondering to each other what it must have been like in the real mud, up about Ypres and Passchendaele, two years ago. Hicks had been training at Arras last week, where a lot of Tommies were "resting" in the same way, and he had tales to tell.

The Battalion got to Joachim farm at nine o'clock. Colonel Harvey had not yet come up, but old Julius Caesar was there with his engineers, and he had a hot breakfast ready for them. At six o'clock in the evening they took the road again, marching until daybreak, with short rests. During the night they captured two Hun patrols, a bunch of thirty men. At the halt for breakfast, the prisoners wanted to make themselves useful, but the cook said they were so filthy the smell of them

XVI

THE Battalion had twenty-four hours' rest at Rupprecht trench, and then pushed on for four days and nights, stealing trenches, capturing patrols, with only a few hours' sleep,— snatched by the roadside while their food was being prepared. They pushed hard after a retiring foe, and almost outran themselves. They did outrun their provisions; on the fourth night, when they fell upon a farm that had been a German Headquarters, the supplies that were to meet them there had not come up, and they went to bed supperless.

This farmhouse, for some reason called by the prisoners Frau Hulda farm, was a nest of telephone wires; hundreds of them ran out through the walls, in all directions. The Colonel cut those he could find, and then put a guard over the old peasant who had been left in charge of the house, suspecting that he was in the pay of the enemy.

At last Colonel Scott got into the Headquarters bed, large and lumpy,— the first one he had seen since he left Arras. He had not been asleep more than two hours, when a runner arrived with orders from the Regimental Colonel. Claude was in a bed in the loft, between Gerhardt and Bruger. He felt somebody shaking him, but resolved that he wouldn't be disturbed and went on placidly sleeping. Then somebody pulled his hair,— so hard that he sat up. Captain Maxey was standing over the bed.

"Come along, boys. Orders from Regimental Headquarters.

The Battalion is to split here. Our Company is to go on four kilometers tonight, and take the town of Beaufort."

Claude rose. "The men are pretty well beat out, Captain Maxey, and they had no supper."

"That can't be helped. Tell them we are to be in Beaufort for breakfast."

Claude and Gerhardt went out to the barn and roused Hicks and his pal, Dell Able. The men were asleep in dry straw, for the first time in ten days. They were completely worn out, lost to time and place. Many of them were already four thousand miles away, scattered among little towns and farms on the prairie. They were a miserable looking lot as they got together, stumbling about in the dark.

After the Colonel had gone over the map with Captain Maxey, he came out and saw the Company assembled. He wasn't going with them, he told them, but he expected them to give a good account of themselves. Once in Beaufort, they would have a week's rest; sleep under cover, and live among people for awhile.

The men took the road, some with their eyes shut, trying to make believe they were still asleep, trying to have their agreeable dreams over again, as they marched. They did not really waken up until the advance challenged a Hun patrol, and sent it back to the Colonel under a one-man guard. When they had advanced two kilometers, they found the bridge blown up. Claude and Hicks went in one direction to look for a ford, Bruger and Dell Able in the other, and the men lay down by the roadside and slept heavily. Just at dawn they reached the outskirts of the village, silent and still.

Captain Maxey had no information as to how many Germans

might be left in the town. They had occupied it ever since the beginning of the war, and had used it as a rest camp. There had never been any fighting there.

At the first house on the road, the Captain stopped and pounded. No answer.

"We are Americans, and must see the people of the house. If you don't open, we must break the door."

A woman's voice called; "There is nobody here. Go away, please, and take your men away. I am sick."

The Captain called Gerhardt, who began to explain and reassure through the door. It opened a little way, and an old woman in a nightcap peeped out. An old man hovered behind her. She gazed in astonishment at the officers, not understanding. These were the first soldiers of the Allies she had ever seen. She had heard the Germans talk about Americans, but thought it was one of their lies, she said. Once convinced, she let the officers come in and replied to their questions.

No, there were no Boches left in her house. They had got orders to leave day before yesterday, and had blown up the bridge. They were concentrating somewhere to the east. She didn't know how many were still in the village, nor where they were, but she could tell the Captain where they had been. Triumphantly she brought out a map of the town — lost, she said with a meaning smile, by a German officer — on which the billets were marked.

With this to guide them, Captain Maxey and his men went on up the street. They took eight prisoners in one cellar, seventeen in another. When the villagers saw the prisoners bunched together in the square, they came out of their houses and gave information. This cleaning up, Bert Fuller re-

marked, was like taking fish from the Platte River when the water was low,— simply pailing them out! There was no sport in it.

At nine o'clock the officers were standing together in the square before the church, checking off on the map the houses that had been searched. The men were drinking coffee, and eating fresh bread from a baker's shop. The square was full of people who had come out to see for themselves. Some believed that deliverance had come, and others shook their heads and held back, suspecting another trick. A crowd of children were running about, making friends with the soldiers. One little girl with yellow curls and a clean white dress had attached herself to Hicks, and was eating chocolate out of his pocket. Gerhardt was bargaining with the baker for another baking of bread. The sun was shining, for a change,— everything was looking cheerful. This village seemed to be swarming with girls; some of them were pretty, and all were friendly. The men who had looked so haggard and forlorn when dawn overtook them at the edge of the town, began squaring their shoulders and throwing out their chests. They were dirty and mud-plastered, but as Claude remarked to the Captain, they actually looked like fresh men.

Suddenly a shot rang out above the chatter, and an old woman in a white cap screamed and tumbled over on the pavement,— rolled about, kicking indecorously with both hands and feet. A second crack,— the little girl who stood beside Hicks, eating chocolate, threw out her hands, ran a few steps, and fell, blood and brains oozing out in her yellow hair. The people began screaming and running. The Americans looked this way and that; ready to dash, but not knowing where to go. Another shot, and Captain Maxey fell on one knee,

blushed furiously and sprang up, only to fall again,— ashy white, with the leg of his trousers going red.

"There it is, to the left!" Hicks shouted, pointing. They saw now. From a closed house, some distance down a street off the square, smoke was coming. It hung before one of the upstairs windows. The Captain's orderly dragged him into a wineshop. Claude and David, followed by the men, ran down the street and broke in the door. The two officers went through the rooms on the first floor, while Hicks and his lot made straight for an enclosed stairway at the back of the house. As they reached the foot of the stairs, they were met by a volley of rifle shots, and two of the men tumbled over. Four Germans were stationed at the head of the steps.

The Americans scarcely knew whether their bullets or their bayonets got to the Huns first; they were not conscious of going up, till they were there. When Claude and David reached the landing, the squad were wiping their bayonets, and four grey bodies were piled in the corner.

Bert Fuller and Dell Able ran down the narrow hallway and threw open the door into the room on the street. Two shots, and Dell came back with his jaw shattered and the blood spouting from the left side of his neck. Gerhardt caught him, and tried to close the artery with his fingers.

"How many are in there, Bert?" Claude called.

"I couldn't see. Look out, sir! You can't get through that door more than two at a time!"

The door still stood open, at the end of the corridor. Claude went down the steps until he could sight along the floor of the passage, into the front room. The shutters were closed in there, and the sunlight came through the slats. In the middle of the floor, between the door and the windows, stood a tall chest

of drawers, with a mirror attached to the top. In the narrow space between the bottom of this piece of furniture and the floor, he could see a pair of boots. It was possible there was but one man in the room, shooting from behind his movable fort,— though there might be others hidden in the corners.

"There's only one fellow in there, I guess. He's shooting from behind a big dresser in the middle of the room. Come on, one of you, we'll have to go in and get him."

Willy Katz, the Austrian boy from the Omaha packing house, stepped up and stood beside him.

"Now, Willy, we'll both go in at once; you jump to the right, and I to the left,— and one of us will jab him. He can't shoot both ways at once. Are you ready? All right — Now!"

Claude thought he was taking the more dangerous position himself, but the German probably reasoned that the important man would be on the right. As the two Americans dashed through the door, he fired. Claude caught him in the back with his bayonet, under the shoulder blade, but Willy Katz had got the bullet in his brain, through one of his blue eyes. He fell, and never stirred. The German officer fired his revolver again as he went down, shouting in English, English with no foreign accent,

"You swine, go back to Chicago!" Then he began choking with blood.

Sergeant Hicks ran in and shot the dying man through the temples. Nobody stopped him.

The officer was a tall man, covered with medals and orders; must have been very handsome. His linen and his hands were as white as if he were going to a ball. On the dresser were the files and paste and buffers with which he had kept his nails

so pink and smooth. A ring with a ruby, beautifully cut, was on his little finger. Bert Fuller screwed it off and offered it to Claude. He shook his head. That English sentence had unnerved him. Bert held the ring out to Hicks, but the Sergeant threw down his revolver and broke out:

"Think I'd touch anything of his? That beautiful little girl, and my buddy — He's worse than dead, Dell is, worse!" He turned his back on his comrades so that they wouldn't see him cry.

"Can I keep it myself, sir?" Bert asked.

Claude nodded. David had come in, and was opening the shutters. This officer, Claude was thinking, was a very different sort of being from the poor prisoners they had been scooping up like tadpoles from the cellars. One of the men picked up a gorgeous silk dressing gown from the bed, another pointed to a dressing-case full of hammered silver. Gerhardt said it was Russian silver; this man must have come from the Eastern front. Bert Fuller and Nifty Jones were going through the officer's pockets. Claude watched them, and thought they did about right. They didn't touch his medals; but his gold cigarette case, and the platinum watch still ticking on his wrist,— he wouldn't have further need for them. Around his neck, hung by a delicate chain, was a miniature case, and in it was a painting,— not, as Bert romantically hoped when he opened it, of a beautiful woman, but of a young man, pale as snow, with blurred forget-me-not eyes.

Claude studied it, wondering. "It looks like a poet, or something. Probably a kid brother, killed at the beginning of the war."

Gerhardt took it and glanced at it with a disdainful express-

ion. "Probably. There, let him keep it, Bert." He touched Claude on the shoulder to call his attention to the inlay work on the handle of the officer's revolver.

Claude noticed that David looked at him as if he were very much pleased with him,— looked, indeed, as if something pleasant had happened in this room; where, God knew, nothing had; where, when they turned round, a swarm of black flies was quivering with greed and delight over the smears Willy Katz' body had left on the floor. Claude had often observed that when David had an interesting idea, or a strong twinge of recollection, it made him, for the moment, rather heartless. Just now he felt that Gerhardt's flash of high spirits was in some way connected with him. Was it because he had gone in with Willy? Had David doubted his nerve?

XVII

WHEN the survivors of Company B are old men, and are telling over their good days, they will say to each other, "Oh, that week we spent at Beaufort!" They will close their eyes and see a little village on a low ridge, lost in the forest, overgrown with oak and chestnut and black walnut . . . buried in autumn colour, the streets drifted deep in autumn leaves, great branches interlacing over the roofs of the houses, wells of cool water that tastes of moss and tree roots. Up and down those streets they will see figures passing; themselves, young and brown and clean-limbed; and comrades, long dead, but still alive in that far-away village. How they will wish they could tramp again, nights on days in the mud and rain, to drag sore feet into their old billets at Beaufort! To sink into those wide feather beds and sleep the round of the clock while the old women washed and dried their clothes for them; to eat rabbit stew and *pommes frites* in the garden, — rabbit stew made with red wine and chestnuts. Oh, the days that are no more!

As soon as Captain Maxey and the wounded men had been started on their long journey to the rear, carried by the prisoners, the whole company turned in and slept for twelve hours — all but Sergeant Hicks, who sat in the house off the square, beside the body of his chum.

The next day the Americans came to life as if they were new men, just created in a new world. And the people of the town came to life . . . excitement, change, something to look

forward to at last! A new flag, *le drapeau étoilé,* floated along with the tricolour in the square. At sunset the soldiers stood in formation behind it and sang "The Star Spangled Banner" with uncovered heads. The old people watched them from the doorways. The Americans were the first to bring "Madelon" to Beaufort. The fact that the village had never heard this song, that the children stood round begging for it, *"Chantez-vous la Madelon!"* made the soldiers realize how far and how long out of the world these villagers had been. The German occupation was like a deafness which nothing pierced but their own arrogant martial airs.

Before Claude was out of bed after his first long sleep, a runner arrived from Colonel Scott, notifying him that he was in charge of the Company until further orders. The German prisoners had buried their own dead and dug graves for the Americans before they were sent off to the rear. Claude and David were billeted at the edge of the town, with the woman who had given Captain Maxey his first information, when they marched in yesterday morning. Their hostess told them, at their mid-day breakfast, that the old dame who was shot in the square, and the little girl, were to be buried this afternoon. Claude decided that the Americans might as well have their funeral at the same time. He thought he would ask the priest to say a prayer at the graves, and he and David set off through the brilliant, rustling autumn sunshine to find the Curé's house. It was next the church, with a high-walled garden behind it. Over the bell-pull in the outer wall was a card on which was written, *"Tirez fort."*

The priest himself came out to them, an old man who seemed weak like his doorbell. He stood in his black cap, holding his hands against his breast to keep them from shaking, and looked

very old indeed,— broken, hopeless, as if he were sick of this world and done with it. Nowhere in France had Claude seen a face so sad as his. Yes, he would say a prayer. It was better to have Christian burial, and they were far from home, poor fellows! David asked him whether the German rule had been very oppressive, but the old man did not answer clearly, and his hands began to shake so uncontrollably over his cassock that they went away to spare him embarrassment.

"He seems a little gone in the head, don't you think?" Claude remarked.

"I suppose the war has used him up. How can he celebrate mass when his hands quiver so?" As they crossed the church steps, David touched Claude's arm and pointed into the square. "Look, every doughboy has a girl already! Some of them have trotted out fatigue caps! I supposed they'd thrown them all away!"

Those who had no caps stood with their helmets under their arms, in attitudes of exaggerated gallantry, talking to the women,— who seemed all to have errands abroad. Some of them let the boys carry their baskets. One soldier was giving a delighted little girl a ride on his back.

After the funeral every man in the Company found some sympathetic woman to talk to about his fallen comrades. All the garden flowers and bead wreaths in Beaufort had been carried out and put on the American graves. When the squad fired over them and the bugle sounded, the girls and their mothers wept. Poor Willy Katz, for instance, could never have had such a funeral in South Omaha.

The next night the soldiers began teaching the girls to dance the "Pas Seul" and the "Fausse Trot." They had found an old violin in the town; and Oscar, the Swede, scraped away on

it. They danced every evening. Claude saw that a good deal was going on, and he lectured his men at parade. But he realized that he might as well scold at the sparrows. Here was a village with several hundred women, and only the grandmothers had husbands. All the men were in the army; hadn't even been home on leave since the Germans first took the place. The girls had been shut up for four years with young men who incessantly coveted them, and whom they must constantly outwit. The situation had been intolerable — and prolonged. The Americans found themselves in the position of Adam in the garden.

"Did you know, sir," said Bert Fuller breathlessly as he overtook Claude in the street after parade, "that these lovely girls had to go out in the fields and work, raising things for those dirty pigs to eat? Yes, sir, had to work in the fields, under German sentinels; marched out in the morning and back at night like convicts! It's sure up to us to give them a good time now."

One couldn't walk out of an evening without meeting loitering couples in the dusky streets and lanes. The boys had lost all their bashfulness about trying to speak French. They declared they could get along in France with three verbs, and all, happily, in the first conjugation: *manger, aimer, payer,*— quite enough! They called Beaufort "our town," and they were called "our Americans." They were going to come back after the war, and marry the girls, and put in water-works!

"Chez-moi, sir!" Bill Gates called to Claude, saluting with a bloody hand, as he stood skinning rabbits before the door of his billet. "Bunny casualties are heavy in town this week!"

"You know, Wheeler," David remarked one morning as they were shaving, "I think Maxey would come back here on one leg

if he knew about these excursions into the forest after mushrooms."

"Maybe."

"Aren't you going to put a stop to them?"

"Not I!" Claude jerked, setting the corners of his mouth grimly. "If the girls, or their people, make complaint to me, I'll interfere. Not otherwise. I've thought the matter over."

"Oh, the girls—" David laughed softly. "Well, it's something to acquire a taste for mushrooms. They don't get them at home, do they?"

When, after eight days, the Americans had orders to march, there was mourning in every house. On their last night in town, the officers received pressing invitations to the dance in the square. Claude went for a few moments, and looked on. David was dancing every dance, but Hicks was nowhere to be seen. The poor fellow had been out of everything. Claude went over to the church to see whether he might be moping in the graveyard.

There, as he walked about, Claude stopped to look at a grave that stood off by itself, under a privet hedge, with withered leaves and a little French flag on it. The old woman with whom they stayed had told them the story of this grave.

The Curé's niece was buried there. She was the prettiest girl in Beaufort, it seemed, and she had a love affair with a German officer and disgraced the town. He was a young Bavarian, quartered with this same old woman who told them the story, and she said he was a nice boy, handsome and gentle, and used to sit up half the night in the garden with his head in his hands — homesick, lovesick. He was always after this Marie Louise; never pressed her, but was always there, grew up

out of the ground under her feet, the old woman said. The girl hated Germans, like all the rest, and flouted him. He was sent to the front. Then he came back, sick and almost deaf, after one of the slaughters at Verdun, and stayed a long while. That spring a story got about that some woman met him at night in the German graveyard. The Germans had taken the land behind the church for their cemetery, and it joined the wall of the Curé's garden. When the women went out into the fields to plant the crops, Marie Louise used to slip away from the others and meet her Bavarian in the forest. The girls were sure of it now; and they treated her with disdain. But nobody was brave enough to say anything to the Curé. One day, when she was with her Bavarian in the wood, she snatched up his revolver from the ground and shot herself. She was a Frenchwoman at heart, their hostess said.

"And the Bavarian?" Claude asked David later. The story had become so complicated he could not follow it.

"He justified her, and promptly. He took the same pistol and shot himself through the temples. His orderly, stationed at the edge of the thicket to keep watch, heard the first shot and ran toward them. He saw the officer take up the smoking pistol and turn it on himself. But the Kommandant couldn't believe that one of his officers had so much feeling. He held an *enquête,* dragged the girl's mother and uncle into court, and tried to establish that they were in conspiracy with her to seduce and murder a German officer. The orderly was made to tell the whole story; how and where they began to meet. Though he wasn't very delicate about the details he divulged, he stuck to his statement that he saw Lieutenant Müller shoot himself with his own hand, and the Kommandant failed to prove his case. The old Curé had known nothing of

all this until he heard it aired in the military court. Marie Louise had lived in his house since she was a child, and was like his daughter. He had a stroke or something, and has been like this ever since. The girl's friends forgave her, and when she was buried off alone by the hedge, they began to take flowers to her grave. The Kommandant put up an *affiche* on the hedge, forbidding any one to decorate the grave. Apparently, nothing during the German occupation stirred up more feeling than poor Marie Louise."

It would stir anybody, Claude reflected. There was her lonely little grave, the shadow of the privet hedge falling across it. There, at the foot of the Curé's garden, was the German cemetery, with heavy cement crosses,— some of them with long inscriptions; lines from their poets, and couplets from old hymns. Lieutenant Müller was there somewhere, probably. Strange, how their story stood out in a world of suffering. That was a kind of misery he hadn't happened to think of before; but the same thing must have occurred again and again in the occupied territory. He would never forget the Curé's hands, his dim, suffering eyes.

Claude recognized David crossing the pavement in front of the church, and went back to meet him.

"Hello! I mistook you for Hicks at first. I thought he might be out here." David sat down on the steps and lit a cigarette.

"So did I. I came out to look for him."

"Oh, I expect he's found some shoulder to cry on. Do you realize, Claude, you and I are the only men in the Company who haven't got engaged? Some of the married men have got engaged twice. It's a good thing we're pulling out, or we'd have banns and a bunch of christenings to look after."

"All the same," murmured Claude, "I like the women of this country, as far as I've seen them." While they sat smoking in silence, his mind went back to the quiet scene he had watched on the steps of that other church, on his first night in France; the country girl in the moonlight, bending over her sick soldier.

When they walked back across the square, over the crackling leaves, the dance was breaking up. Oscar was playing "Home, Sweet Home," for the last waltz.

"*Le dernier baiser,*" said David. "Well, tomorrow we'll be gone, and the chances are we won't come back this way."

XVIII

"WITH us it's always a feast or a famine," the men groaned, when they sat down by the road to munch dry biscuit at noon. They had covered eighteen miles that morning, and had still seven more to go. They were ordered to do the twenty-five miles in eight hours. Nobody had fallen out yet, but some of the boys looked pretty well wilted. Nifty Jones said he was done for. Sergeant Hicks was expostulating with the faint-hearted. He knew that if one man fell out, a dozen would.

"If I can do it, you can. It's worse on a fat man like me. This is no march to make a fuss about. Why, at Arras I talked with a little Tommy from one of those Pal Battalions that got slaughtered on the Somme. His battalion marched twenty-five miles in six hours, in the heat of July, into certain death. They were all kids out of school, not a man of them over five-foot-three, called them the 'Bantams.' You've got to hand it to them, fellows."

"I'll hand anything to anybody, but I can't go no farther on these," Jones muttered, nursing his sore feet.

"Oh, you! We're going to heave you onto the only horse in the Company. The officers, they can walk!"

When they got into Battalion lines there was food ready for them, but very few wanted it. They drank and lay down in the bushes. Claude went at once to Headquarters and found Barclay Owens, of the Engineers, with the Colonel, who was smoking and studying his maps as usual.

"Glad to see you, Wheeler. Your men ought to be in good shape, after a week's rest. Let them sleep now. We've got to move out of here before midnight, to relieve two Texas battalions at Moltke trench. They've taken the trench with heavy casualties and are beat out; couldn't hold it in case of counter-attack. As it's an important point, the enemy will try to recover it. I want to get into position before daylight, so he won't know fresh troops are coming in. As ranking officer, you are in charge of the Company."

"Very well, sir. I'll do my best."

"I'm sure you will. Two machine gun teams are going up with us, and some time tomorrow a Missouri battalion comes up to support. I'd have had you over here before, but I only got my orders to relieve yesterday. We may have to advance under shell fire. The enemy has been putting a lot of big stuff over; he wants to cut off that trench."

Claude and David got into a fresh shell hole, under the half-burned scrub, and fell asleep. They were awakened at dusk by heavy artillery fire from the north.

At ten o'clock the Battalion, after a hot meal, began to advance through almost impassable country. The guns must have been pounding away at the same range for a long while; the ground was worked and kneaded until it was soft as dough, though no rain had fallen for a week. Barclay Owens and his engineers were throwing down a plank road to get food and the ammunition wagons across. Big shells were coming over at intervals of twelve minutes. The intervals were so regular that it was quite possible to get forward without damage. While B Company was pulling through the shell area, Colonel Scott overtook them, on foot, his orderly leading his horse.

"Know anything about that light over there, Wheeler?" he

asked. "Well, it oughtn't to be there. Come along and see."

The light was a mere match-head down in the ground,—Claude hadn't noticed it before. He followed the Colonel, and when they reached the spark they found three officers of A Company crouching in a shell crater, covered with a piece of sheet-iron.

"Put out that light," called the Colonel sharply. "What's the matter, Captain Brace?"

A young man rose quickly. "I'm waiting for the water, sir. It's coming up on mules, in petrol cases, and I don't want to get separated from it. The ground's so bad here the drivers are likely to get lost."

"Don't wait more than twenty minutes. You must get up and take your position on time, that's the important thing, water or no water."

As the Colonel and Claude hurried back to overtake the Company, five big shells screamed over them in rapid succession. "Run, sir," the orderly called. "They're getting on to us; they've shortened the range."

"That light back there was just enough to give them an idea," the Colonel muttered.

The bad ground continued for about a mile, and then the advance reached Headquarters, behind the eighth trench of the great system of trenches. It was an old farmhouse which the Germans had made over with reinforced concrete, lining it within and without, until the walls were six feet thick and almost shell-proof, like a pill-box. The Colonel sent his orderly to enquire about A Company. A young Lieutenant came to the door of the farmhouse.

"A Company is ready to go into position, sir. I brought them up."

"Where is Captain Brace, Lieutenant?"

"He and both our first lieutenants were killed, Colonel. Back in that hole. A shell fell on them not five minutes after you were talking to them."

"That's bad. Any other damage?"

"Yes, sir. There was a cook wagon struck at the same time; the first one coming along Julius Caesar's new road. The driver was killed, and we had to shoot the horses. Captain Owens, he near got scalded with the stew."

The Colonel called in the officers one after another and discussed their positions with them.

"Wheeler," he said when Claude's turn came, "you know your map? You've noticed that sharp loop in the front trench, in H 2;— the Boar's Head, I believe they call it. It's a sort of spear point that reaches out toward the enemy, and it will be a hot place to hold. If I put your company in there, do you think you can do the Battalion credit in case of a counter attack?"

Claude said he thought so.

"It's the nastiest bit of the line to hold, and you can tell your men I pay them a compliment when I put them there."

"All right, sir. They'll appreciate it."

The Colonel bit off the end of a fresh cigar. "They'd better, by thunder! If they give way and let the Hun bombers in, it will let down the whole line. I'll give you two teams of Georgia machine guns to put in that point they call the Boar's Snout. When the Missourians come up tomorrow, they'll go in to support you, but until then you'll have to take care of the loop yourselves. I've got an awful lot of trench to hold, and I can't spare you any more men."

The Texas men whom the Battalion came up to relieve had

been living for sixty hours on their iron rations, and on what they could pick off the dead Huns. Their supplies had been shelled on the way, and nothing had got through to them. When the Colonel took Claude and Gerhardt forward to inspect the loop that B Company was to hold, they found a wallow, more like a dump heap than a trench. The men who had taken the position were almost too weak to stand. All their officers had been killed, and a sergeant was in command. He apologized for the condition of the loop.

"Sorry to leave such a mess for you to clean up, sir, but we got it bad in here. He's been shelling us every night since we drove him out. I couldn't ask the men to do anything but hold on."

"That's all right. You beat it, with your boys, quick! My men will hand you out some grub as you go back."

The battered defenders of the Boar's Head stumbled past them through the darkness into the communication. When the last man had filed out, the Colonel sent for Barclay Owens. Claude and David tried to feel their way about and get some idea of the condition the place was in. The stench was the worst they had yet encountered, but it was less disgusting than the flies; when they inadvertently touched a dead body, clouds of wet, buzzing flies flew up into their faces, into their eyes and nostrils. Under their feet the earth worked and moved as if boa constrictors were wriggling down there — soft bodies, lightly covered. When they had found their way up to the Snout they came upon a pile of corpses, a dozen or more, thrown one on top of another like sacks of flour, faintly discernible in the darkness. While the two officers stood there, rumbling, squirting sounds began to come from this heap, first from one body, then from another — gases,

swelling in the liquefying entrails of the dead men. They seemed to be complaining to one another; *glup, glup, glup.*

The boys went back to the Colonel, who was standing at the mouth of the communication, and told him there was nothing much to report, except that the burying squad was needed badly.

"I expect!" The Colonel shook his head. When Barclay Owens arrived, he asked him what could be done here before daybreak. The doughty engineer felt his way about as Claude and Gerhardt had done; they heard him coughing, and beating off the flies. But when he came back he seemed rather cheered than discouraged.

"Give me a gang to get the casualties out, and with plenty of quick-lime and concrete I can make this loop all right in four hours, sir," he declared.

"I've brought plenty of lime, but where'll you get your concrete?"

"The Hun left about fifty sacks of it in the cellar, under your Headquarters. I can do better, of course, if I have a few hours more for my concrete to dry."

"Go ahead, Captain." The Colonel told Claude and David to bring their men up to the communication before light, and hold them ready. "Give Owens' cement a chance, but don't let the enemy put over any surprise on you."

The shelling began again at daybreak; it was hardest on the rear trenches and the three-mile area behind. Evidently the enemy felt sure of what he had in Moltke trench; he wanted to cut off supplies and possible reinforcements. The Missouri battalion did not come up that day, but before noon a runner arrived from their Colonel, with information that they

were hiding in the wood. Five Boche planes had been circling over the wood since dawn, signalling to the enemy Headquarters back on Dauphin Ridge; the Missourians were sure they had avoided detection by lying close in the under-brush. They would come up in the night. Their linemen were following the runner, and Colonel Scott would be in telephone communication with them in half an hour.

When B Company moved into the Boar's Head at one o'clock in the afternoon, they could truthfully say that the prevailing smell was now that of quick-lime. The parapet was evenly built up, the firing step had been partly restored, and in the Snout there were good emplacements for the machine guns. Certain unpleasant reminders were still to be found if one looked for them. In the Snout a large fat boot stuck stiffly from the side of the trench. Captain Owens explained that the ground sounded hollow in there, and the boot probably led back into a dugout where a lot of Hun bodies were entombed together. As he was pressed for time, he had thought best not to look for trouble. In one of the curves of the loop, just at the top of the earth wall, under the sand bags, a dark hand reached out; the five fingers, well apart, looked like the swollen roots of some noxious weed. Hicks declared that this object was disgusting, and during the afternoon he made Nifty Jones and Oscar scrape down some earth and make a hump over the paw. But there was shelling in the night, and the earth fell away.

"Look," said Jones when he wakened his Sergeant. "The first thing I seen when daylight come was his old fingers, wigglin' in the breeze. He wants air, Heinie does; he won't stay covered."

Hicks got up and re-buried the hand himself, but when he

came around with Claude on inspection, before breakfast, there were the same five fingers sticking out again. The Sergeant's forehead puffed up and got red, and he swore that if he found the man who played dirty jokes, he'd make him eat this one.

The Colonel sent for Claude and Gerhardt to come to breakfast with him. He had been talking by telephone with the Missouri officers and had agreed that they should stay back in the bush for the present. The continual circling of planes over the wood seemed to indicate that the enemy was concerned about the actual strength of Moltke trench. It was possible their air scouts had seen the Texas men going back,— otherwise, why were they holding off?

While the Colonel and the officers were at breakfast, a corporal brought in two pigeons he had shot at dawn. One of them carried a message under its wing. The Colonel unrolled a strip of paper and handed it to Gerhardt.

"Yes, sir, it's in German, but it's code stuff. It's a German nursery rhyme. Those reconnoitering planes must have dropped scouts on our rear, and they are sending in reports. Of course, they can get more on us than the air men can. Here, do you want these birds, Dick?"

The boy grinned. "You bet I do, sir! I may get a chance to fry 'em, later on."

After breakfast the Colonel went to inspect B Company in the Boar's Head. He was especially pleased with the advantageous placing of the machine guns in the Snout. "I expect you'll have a quiet day," he said to the men, "but I wouldn't like to promise you a quiet night. You'll have to be very steady in here; if Fritz takes this loop, he's got us, you understand."

They had, indeed, a quiet day. Some of the men played

cards, and Oscar read his Bible. The night, too, began well. But at four fifteen everybody was roused by the gas alarm. Gas shells came over for exactly half an hour. Then the shrapnel broke loose; not the long, whizzing scream of solitary shells, but drum-fire, continuous and deafening. A hundred electrical storms seemed raging at once, in the air and on the ground. Balls of fire were rolling all over the place. The range was a little long for the Boar's Head, they were not getting the worst of it; but thirty yards back everything was torn to pieces. Claude didn't see how anybody could be left alive back there. A single twister had killed six of his men at the rear of the loop, where they were shovelling to keep the communication clear. Captain Owens' neat earthworks were being badly pounded.

Claude and Gerhardt were consulting together when the smoke and darkness began to take on the livid colour that announced the coming of daybreak. A messenger ran in from the Colonel; the Missourians had not yet come up, and his telephone communication with them was cut off. He was afraid they had got lost in the bombardment. "The Colonel says you are to send two men back to bring them up; two men who can take charge if they're stampeded."

When the messenger shouted this order, Gerhardt and Hicks looked at each other quickly, and volunteered to go.

Claude hesitated. Hicks and David waited for no further consent; they ran down the communication and disappeared.

Claude stood in the smoke that was slowly growing greyer, and looked after them with the deepest stab of despair he had ever known. Only a man who was bewildered and unfit to be in command of other men would have let his best friend and his best officer take such a risk. He was standing there under

shelter, and his two friends were going back through that curtain of flying steel, toward the square from which the lost battalion had last reported. If he knew them, they would not lose time following the maze of trenches; they were probably even now out on the open, running straight through the enemy barrage, vaulting trench tops.

Claude turned and went back into the loop. Well, whatever happened, he had worked with brave men. It was worth having lived in this world to have known such men. Soldiers, when they were in a tight place, often made secret propositions to God; and now he found himself offering terms: If They would see to it that David came back, They could take the price out of him. He would pay. Did They understand?

An hour dragged by. Hard on the nerves, waiting. Up the communication came a train with ammunition and coffee for the loop. The men thought Headquarters did pretty well to get hot food to them through that barrage. A message came up in the Colonel's hand:

"Be ready when the barrage stops."

Claude took this up and showed it to the machine gunners in the Snout. Turning back, he ran into Hicks, stripped to his shirt and trousers, as wet as if he had come out of the river, and splashed with blood. His hand was wrapped up in a rag. He put his mouth to Claude's ear and shouted: "We found them. They were lost. They're coming. Send word to the Colonel."

"Where's Gerhardt?"

"He's coming; bringing them up. God, it's stopped!"

The bombardment ceased with a suddenness that was stupe-

fying. The men in the loop gasped and crouched as if they were falling from a height. The air, rolling black with smoke and stifling with the smell of gases and burning powder, was still as death. The silence was like a heavy anaesthetic.

Claude ran back to the Snout to see that the gun teams were ready. "Wake up, boys! You know why we're here!"

Bert Fuller, who was up in the look-out, dropped back into the trench beside him. "They're coming, sir."

Claude gave the signal to the machine guns. Fire opened all along the loop. In a moment a breeze sprang up, and the heavy smoke clouds drifted to the rear. Mounting to the fire-step, he peered over. The enemy was coming on eight deep, on the left of the Boar's Head, in long, waving lines that reached out toward the main trench. Suddenly the advance was checked. The files of running men dropped behind a wrinkle in the earth fifty yards forward and did not instantly re-appear. It struck Claude that they were waiting for something; he ought to be clever enough to know for what, but he was not. The Colonel's line man came up to him.

"Headquarters has a runner from the Missourians. They'll be up in twenty minutes. The Colonel will put them in here at once. Till then you must manage to hold."

"We'll hold. Fritz is behaving queerly. I don't understand his tactics . . . "

While he was speaking, everything was explained. The Boar's Snout spread apart with an explosion that split the earth, and went up in a volcano of smoke and flame. Claude and the Colonel's messenger were thrown on their faces. When they got to their feet, the Snout was a smoking crater full of dead and dying men. The Georgia gun teams were gone.

It was for this that the Hun advance had been waiting be-

hind the ridge. The mine under the Snout had been made long ago, probably, on a venture, when the Hun held Moltke trench for months without molestation. During the last twenty-four hours they had been getting their explosives in, reasoning that the strongest garrison would be placed there.

Here they were, coming on the run. It was up to the rifles. The men who had been knocked down by the shock were all on their feet again. They looked at their officer questioningly, as if the whole situation had changed. Claude felt they were going soft under his eyes. In a moment the Hun bombers would be in on them, and they would break. He ran along the trench, pointing over the sand bags and shouting, "It's up to you, it's up to you!"

The rifles recovered themselves and began firing, but Claude felt they were spongy and uncertain, that their minds were already on the way to the rear. If they did anything, it must be quick, and their gun-work must be accurate. Nothing but a withering fire could check. . . . He sprang to the fire-step and then out on the parapet. Something instantaneous happened; he had his men in hand.

"Steady, steady!" He called the range to the rifle teams behind him, and he could see the fire take effect. All along the Hun lines men were stumbling and falling. They swerved a little to the left; he called the rifles to follow, directing them with his voice and with his hands. It was not only that from here he could correct the range and direct the fire; the men behind him had become like rock. That line of faces below, Hicks, Jones, Fuller, Anderson, Oscar. . . . Their eyes never left him. With these men he could do anything.

The right of the Hun line swerved out, not more than twenty yards from the battered Snout, trying to run to shelter

under that pile of débris and human bodies. A quick concentration of rifle fire depressed it, and the swell came out again toward the left. Claude's appearance on the parapet had attracted no attention from the enemy at first, but now the bullets began popping about him; two rattled on his tin hat, one caught him in the shoulder. The blood dripped down his coat, but he felt no weakness. He felt only one thing; that he commanded wonderful men. When David came up with the supports he might find them dead, but he would find them all there. They were there to stay until they were carried out to be buried. They were mortal, but they were unconquerable.

The Colonel's twenty minutes must be almost up, he thought. He couldn't take his eyes from the front line long enough to look at his wrist watch. . . . The men behind him saw Claude sway as if he had lost his balance and were trying to recover it. Then he plunged, face down, outside the parapet. Hicks caught his foot and pulled him back. At the same moment the Missourians ran yelling up the communication. They threw their machine guns up on the sand bags and went into action without an unnecessary motion.

Hicks and Bert Fuller and Oscar carried Claude forward toward the Snout, out of the way of the supports that were pouring in. He was not bleeding very much. He smiled at them as if he were going to speak, but there was a weak blankness in his eyes. Bert tore his shirt open; three clean bullet holes. By the time they looked at him again, the smile had gone . . . the look that was Claude had faded. Hicks wiped the sweat and smoke from his officer's face.

"Thank God I never told him," he said. "Thank God for that!"

Bert and Oscar knew what Hicks meant. Gerhardt had been blown to pieces at his side when they dashed back through the enemy barrage to find the Missourians. They were running together across the open, not able to see much for smoke. They bumped into a section of wire entanglement, left above an old trench. David cut round to the right, waving Hicks to follow him. The two were not ten yards apart when the shell struck. Then Sergeant Hicks ran on alone.

XIX

THE sun is sinking low, a transport is steaming slowly up the narrows with the tide. The decks are covered with brown men. They cluster over the superstructure like bees in swarming time. Their attitudes are relaxed and lounging. Some look thoughtful, some well contented, some are melancholy, and many are indifferent, as they watch the shore approaching. They are not the same men who went away.

Sergeant Hicks was standing in the stern, smoking, reflecting, watching the twinkle of the red sunset upon the cloudy water. It is more than a year since he sailed for France. The world has changed in that time, and so has he.

Bert Fuller elbowed his way up to the Sergeant. "The doctor says Colonel Maxey is dying. He won't live to get off the boat, much less to ride in the parade in New York tomorrow."

Hicks shrugged, as if Maxey's pneumonia were no affair of his. "Well, we should worry! We've left better officers than him over there."

"I'm not saying we haven't. But it seems too bad, when he's so strong for fuss and feathers. He's been sending cables about that parade for weeks."

"Huh!" Hicks elevated his eyebrows and glanced sidewise in disdain. Presently he sputtered, squinting down at the glittering water, "Colonel Maxey, anyhow! Colonel for what Claude and Gerhardt did, *I* guess!"

Hicks and Bert Fuller have been helping to keep the noble fortress of Ehrenbreitstein. They have always hung together and are usually quarrelling and grumbling at each other when they are off duty. Still, they hang together. They are the last of their group. Nifty Jones and Oscar, God only knows why, have gone on to the Black Sea.

During the year they were in the Rhine valley, Bert and Hicks were separated only once, and that was when Hicks got a two weeks' leave and, by dint of persevering and fatiguing travel, went to Venice. He had no proper passport, and the consuls and officials to whom he had appealed in his difficulties begged him to content himself with something nearer. But he said he was going to Venice because he had always heard about it. Bert Fuller was glad to welcome him back to Coblentz, and gave a "wine party" to celebrate his return. They expect to keep an eye on each other. Though Bert lives on the Platte and Hicks on the Big Blue, the automobile roads between those two rivers are excellent.

Bert is the same sweet-tempered boy he was when he left his mother's kitchen; his gravest troubles have been frequent betrothals. But Hicks' round, chubby face has taken on a slightly cynical expression,—a look quite out of place there. The chances of war have hurt his feelings . . . not that he ever wanted anything for himself. The way in which glittering honours bump down upon the wrong heads in the army, and palms and crosses blossom on the wrong breasts, has, as he says, thrown his compass off a few points.

What Hicks had wanted most in this world was to run a garage and repair shop with his old chum, Dell Able. Beaufort ended all that. He means to conduct a sort of memorial shop, anyhow, with "Hicks and Able" over the door. He wants

to roll up his sleeves and look at the logical and beautiful inwards of automobiles for the rest of his life.

As the transport enters the North River, sirens and steam whistles all along the water front begin to blow their shrill salute to the returning soldiers. The men square their shoulders and smile knowingly at one another; some of them look a little bored. Hicks slowly lights a cigarette and regards the end of it with an expression which will puzzle his friends when he gets home.

By the banks of Lovely Creek, where it began, Claude Wheeler's story still goes on. To the two old women who work together in the farmhouse, the thought of him is always there, beyond everything else, at the farthest edge of consciousness, like the evening sun on the horizon.

Mrs. Wheeler got the word of his death one afternoon in the sitting-room, the room in which he had bade her good-bye. She was reading when the telephone rang.

"Is this the Wheeler farm? This is the telegraph office at Frankfort. We have a message from the War Department,—" the voice hesitated. "Isn't Mr. Wheeler there?"

"No, but you can read the message to me."

Mrs. Wheeler said, "Thank you," and hung up the receiver. She felt her way softly to her chair. She had an hour alone, when there was nothing but him in the room,— but him and the map there, which was the end of his road. Somewhere among those perplexing names, he had found his place.

Claude's letters kept coming for weeks afterward; then came the letters from his comrades and his Colonel to tell her all.

In the dark months that followed, when human nature looked to her uglier than it had ever done before, those letters were

Mrs. Wheeler's comfort. As she read the newspapers, she used to think about the passage of the Red Sea, in the Bible; it seemed as if the flood of meanness and greed had been held back just long enough for the boys to go over, and then swept down and engulfed everything that was left at home. When she can see nothing that has come of it all but evil, she reads Claude's letters over again and reassures herself; for him the call was clear, the cause was glorious. Never a doubt stained his bright faith. She divines so much that he did not write. She knows what to read into those short flashes of enthusiasm; how fully he must have found his life before he could let himself go so far — he, who was so afraid of being fooled! He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more. She would have dreaded the awakening,— she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment. One by one the heroes of that war, the men of dazzling soldiership, leave prematurely the world they have come back to. Airmen whose deeds were tales of wonder, officers whose names made the blood of youth beat faster, survivors of incredible dangers,— one by one they quietly die by their own hand. Some do it in obscure lodging houses, some in their office, where they seemed to be carrying on their business like other men. Some slip over a vessel's side and disappear into the sea. When Claude's mother hears of these things, she shudders and presses her hands tight over her breast, as if she had him there. She feels as if God had saved him from some horrible suffering, some horrible end. For as she reads, she thinks those slayers of themselves were all so like him; they

were the ones who had hoped extravagantly,— who in order to do what they did had to hope extravagantly, and to believe passionately. And they found they had hoped and believed too much. But one she knew, who could ill bear disillusion . . . safe, safe.

Mahailey, when they are alone, sometimes addresses Mrs. Wheeler as "Mudder"; "Now, Mudder, you go upstairs an' lay down an' rest yourself." Mrs. Wheeler knows that then she is thinking of Claude, is speaking for Claude. As they are working at the table or bending over the oven, something reminds them of him, and they think of him together, like one person: Mahailey will pat her back and say, "Never you mind, Mudder; you'll see your boy up yonder." Mrs. Wheeler always feels that God is near,— but Mahailey is not troubled by any knowledge of interstellar spaces, and for her He is nearer still,— directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove.

THE END

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is Old Style No. 1. In design, the face is of English origin, by MacKellar, Smith and Jordan, and bears the workmanlike quality and freedom from "frills" characteristic of English old styles in the period prior to the introduction of the "modern" letter. It gives an evenly textured page that may be read with a minimum of fatigue. Old Style No. 1 was one of the first faces designed and cut by the Linotype Company, and it is still one of the most popular.

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